

SOCIAL JUSTICE PREACHING IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines one of the most overlooked theological areas in the Seventh-day Adventist church: the preaching of social justice. A national shift towards police reform is occurring, and the recent killing of unarmed African Americans has sparked a desire in younger generations of Adventists for the church to engage with social justice issues. Some of the early Adventists urged pastors not to be involved in social justice issues, but to stay true to the Bible; they recommended that we preach only the doctrines of the church, coupled with end-times events. The notion of Seventh-day Adventists refraining from being involved in social justice is quickly being reconsidered, given the national shift towards addressing and reforming systems of injustice that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, such as police brutality.

The aim of this dissertation, therefore, is to develop a model for including social justice preaching in the Seventh-day Adventist church. The dissertation proposes that social justice preaching *is* biblical and *remains* faithful to the original intent of the scripture. In order to substantiate this claim, this dissertation focuses on the Gospel of Luke and shares stories of Jesus protecting and ministering to the marginalized of his time. This dissertation is also practical in nature, providing clergy and lay leaders alike with ways to preach social-justice-oriented sermons to the congregation that is biblical and Christ-centered.

This dissertation includes a context-based sermon series on social justice, which I conducted from within my ministerial context in Murfreesboro, NC. In order to educate my congregation on social justice and to track the effectiveness of my sermons, I asked participants to complete surveys before and after all three sermons of the series. At the conclusion of the sermon series, a focus/ debrief group was created to communicate the next steps and collect congregant's reflections on the series. Ultimately, the church recognized the need for social justice issues to be discussed and the need to minister to the wider community.

DEDICATION

To My Wife Alicia Denise Fearon (Dumpling), My son Jace Carter, My mom Sandra Cassanova Williams, and my late Grandfather, Lowie Cassanova (1948-2006).

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INTRODUCTION

This project consists of a series of social justice sermons, presented to my home church. These sermons specifically address social justice issues that disproportionately affect the black community in the United States. For my ministerial context, this project briefly addresses the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church and historically contextualizes the social justice issues upon which the church or local congregations have the opportunity to educate themselves and to act. The latter part of this essay outlines a three to four weeks sermon series meant to inform my local congregation on social justice issues. However, this sermon series could be applied to the broader Adventist community. Introducing my congregation to the concept of social justice will be vital, and in order to do this, the series will focus on specific portions of the Gospel of Luke, given its concern for the marginalized.

Having accepted the Seventh-day Adventist faith, I have at times felt limited. In some instances, I have felt suppressed concerning police brutality, systematic racism, and other injustices that disproportionately affect our black members in the Seventh-day Adventist church. The Seventh-day Adventist church is a worldwide church with a membership of over twenty-one million. However, the majority of us are tongue-tied about the injustices our black members experience each day and, on the other hand, passionately vocal on the church's policies, procedures, and doctrines. Reading through the Bible and viewing Jesus as always speaking for and working to liberate the oppressed and the marginalized persuaded me to pursue this topic. It dawned on me to develop a social justice preaching Ministry for the Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist Church, my current church context. Hence, this chapter will provide information on my

background and how racial injustice has impacted my ministry context. The Seventh-day Adventist church's doctrines and apocalyptic worldview have prevented this institution from addressing racial injustice substantively, but this doctrinal paucity has inspired me to preach on these issues as a black Jamaican man living in the United States.

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Birth and Early Years

As the first of five children for my mother, and the last of two children for my father, I grew up in the urban district of Old Harbor Bay, St. Catherine, Jamaica. It was a tough neighborhood, and crime and violence were inescapable. My parents were never married, and my father was not present during my formative years. Instead, I grew up with my step-dad and mother in an extended family environment. My stepfather brought with him an older daughter, and she was considered my sister. Meeting all my maternal relatives throughout my years growing up was a transformative experience. I developed a special bond with my grandfather, and it was always both of us since that day. I never knew about my grandmother because she died the year before I was born, a fact I only recently learned. However, my grandfather was dating a wonderful woman, and I considered her my "granny." My step-father worked tirelessly to ensure that my basic needs were met. He taught me the value of hard work and dedication; even though he only had a high school education, he was adamant that the key to getting out of poverty and living a better life was to be zealous for knowledge and matriculate to university.

My stepfather's family is the only paternal side I have ever met. Even though he is not my biological father, his family was generous in welcoming me with open arms. His mom is a very spiritual lady. She taught me the value of Christian education and a love for God. She was very active in her church and received multiple awards for her involvement in various programs. Our household was religiously diverse; my step-dad would worship with the Baptist family; however, on special occasions, his mother would invite us to her church, the Church of God of Prophecy. Her church was an enormous

building with thousands of people gathered to hear the message of Jesus Christ. She was very inspirational to me, seeing her singing in the choir, working at the bake sale, participating in women's Ministry, and sitting on boards among various other departments. She was a giant in her congregation and respected by everyone in our community. She was the community mother, spiritual leader, and mentor for hundreds. She left an indelible image in my mind, knowing how much she loved God and still managed to be her true self in a crime-filled and violent community but respected by everyone in her environs. She would wake us up very early in the morning for family worship. We would assemble and facilitate prayer and singing of hymns would follow, then we read a Bible story for our devotion. Family worship in my formative years was annoying for me; however, looking back, it shaped me into the person I am today. I first learned how to pray and study the Bible in these moments.

My formal education started at the Prophecy Basic School, located in Old Harbor Bay, St. Catherine, Jamaica. Interestingly, my elementary school is the church school of my Grandmother, and she was one of the significant contributors to that school. My foundation started at the church school. I remember we would learn various subjects, and because it is a church school, we started taking Bible class, and prayer was commonly placed in the classroom; during each period we would pray to begin. Attending Basic School was a highlight of my life, and I believe this is where I got a passion for social justice issues.

During this period, the pastor, Pastor Norris Powell, was engaging and spoke about our children's future. He began to speak on injustices and issues affecting our community. The injustices he would talk passionately about are; crime and violence,

teenage pregnancies, drug epidemic, high electric bills, unfair treatment of specific neighborhoods, neglect of bad roads in the rural area, lack of jobs for qualified residents, and lack of financial education in communities. Even as a child, I was inspired by this preacher's passion; I believe he was sent from God and spoke truth to power. He was preaching the Gospel, drawing mainly from Luke's Gospel, noting the many ways Jesus engaged the marginalized, fed the hungry, and cared about the people's issues in the world. This church was on fire, and I could see why thousands were inspired by him and continued to support his Ministry and even the school he started to educate the children of his community. He was not just a man with a vision and audible utterances, and he was a man of vision and action, which he did by building up the community in every possible way.

Each Sunday, I would attend church with my grandmother; this preacher would always preach about the injustices that were happening in the community. He was full of energy and spirit; he was upbeat, genuine, authentic, and educated. He was passionate about calling out the government and the systemic flaws that continue to allow the people of Jamaica to suffer. This was my first experience of church. The church was not just telling you what to do, but the church was showing you how Jesus did it and speaking out to create a better life for the community. The church was bold and identified problems, and spoke out about the government's unfair treatment of individuals in the community. Even though he preached on social justice issues, he engaged the Bible. He would quote from the Gospel according to Luke 14: 12-14:

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame,

the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.¹

He would challenge us to care about the poor because Jesus cares about the poor, the neglected, and the oppressed. "Jesus is always on the side of the oppressed," he would passionately shout. He was biblically and socially oriented to the needs of and the abuse of the marginalized. The Bible was his guide to show us that Jesus demands people to be treated fairly and that we are all equal in the eyes of the savior, leading him to ask why a particular group of people would treat the other as inferior.

While at Old Harbor primary school, I continued to attend the God of Prophecy Church. I was highly gifted in sports and was the soccer team captain at primary school. However, most of my friends were Seventh-day Adventist and started introducing me to a new faith that most of my peers found as a community. We moved into a different neighborhood, and my neighbor was the Bible worker for the Old Harbor Bay Seventh-day Adventist church. My neighbor was quick to introduce himself and welcomed us to the neighborhood. He was a short white man with one of the kindest personalities I have ever met. By this time, I had become the drummer for my Sunday church and was comfortable where I was. My neighbor started getting to know our family, and my friends invited me to their church on Saturday, and I went just to support them. They were strong in their Advent faith.

In all honesty, my first impression of the church was very distasteful; they did not have drums, the keyboard was not playing in melody with the singers, and they were reading from Ellen G. White's books for the sermon. Ellen G. White, whom we will

¹ Luke 14:12-4, *New King James Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1357.

explore further throughout this project, is the co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination; she was considered to be a prophetess. She has written numerous books, and we acknowledged her contact with God; Most Seventh-day Adventists believes her writings are on the same level as the Bible writers or prophets, even though she said her writings are the lesser light pointing us to the greater light that is the Bible. Hence, the service used her books to read for the sermonic portion. It was very laid back and boring, in my estimation. I could not understand why Adventists were so reluctant to express their true selves in the ways I had come to associate with Black Christians, such as call and response, clapping, and being enthusiastic about who they were worshipping. On the other hand, they were more relaxed and seemed to express themselves in a sure way to be accepted in a particular space. The church was quiet, and it seemed like the members were in agony rather than ecstasy, worshipping the true and living God.

Conversion and Baptism

While in high school, I kept attending church services with my friends because it was closer to home, and I had friends my age that I felt comfortable around. My neighbor realized I was coming to church each Sabbath and was building a relationship with members of the church and had teens my age to communicate with regularly. He invited me to an evangelistic series that the entire district was having. I was extremely excited about it because we would travel on buses, and about thirty churches were coming together to participate in these evangelistic endeavors. It was gigantic and incredible; I was amazed at the number of people present. The way they were worshipping was unusual from what I had seen at the Adventist church I attended in my hometown. I was amazed looking at the beauty, and the music was the best I have ever heard in my life. This

evangelistic experience had all the musical instruments, and they were playing in harmony. I had never experienced anything like this before, and I fell in love with the Adventist church for the music and the fantastic people.

The preaching was also tremendous. The preacher was not just reading from the *Spirit of Prophecy* (books by Ellen. G. White). He was preaching powerfully and passionately. He focused on the church's doctrines throughout the entire four weeks of the evangelistic series. He was preaching, "the beneficent Creator, after six days of creation, rested on the Seventh-day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation."² The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. He was showing texts from the Bible to support his claims about the Sabbath and for us to keep the Sabbath day Holy because God/Jesus did so (Genesis 2: 1-2, Exodus 20: 8-11, Luke 4:16, Matthew 12: 1-12). He shared with the large crowd gathered to hear the word of God, and he also allowed us to follow along with a screen projected toward the congregation while he quoted scripture. Closely, I followed the preacher in my Bible to understand the truth that God had put forward for us to live. He was very convincing, and all the text he put forward agreed with what he was passionately saying. The two doctrines that convicted me immediately were the Sabbath and the state of the dead. Firstly, he preached from the Bible that God created the Sabbath, and even Jesus rested on the Sabbath day in his grave. I was fascinated and interested in hearing more. He appealed, and I filled the card out to learn more about the Sabbath and what it meant for me. The Bible worker, my neighbor, and his partner came to my house religiously

² *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe ...: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 222.

five days a week to teach me more about the Bible and enlighten me about the church's doctrines and its foundation in the Bible. They were very biblical and used scripture to answer my questions in a way I had never experienced in my limited time on earth. I was impressed and started to feel a part of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

After three weeks of intense Bible study, and while still attending the evangelistic series, the preacher, on a night where he was passionate and speaking truth to power, appealed for candidates who wanted to be baptized and be a part of the "remnant family of God."³ I was mesmerized by how authentic and biblically sound the church preached. The decision was not hard because all my friends were already Seventh-day Adventists, and I felt that the Bible studies I had participated in had prepared me to be a good Adventist. Hence, On May 2, 2003, I decided to be baptized and gave my life to Jesus Christ that evening, with hundreds of people accepting me in their family as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. The baptism was terrific, and the people were welcoming. I was happy that I had decided to be a Christian in the Adventist faith. I felt that I had learned more about the Bible in four weeks than in all my years at the Church of God of Prophecy. I felt a sense of belonging and family in the Adventist church; I was eager to learn everything I could about the church and help the community in which I was a part. The first Ministry I joined as a new Adventist was the community service ministry. I enjoyed working in our soup kitchen every Wednesday; people could get soup and

³ See Remnant (The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgement hour, proclaim salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His Second Advent.

deliver food for vulnerable populations. This was a wonderful ministry, and I was eager to participate in a church that helped the marginalized in my community.

After a few months of attending church, I felt at peace, like I had made the right decision. I then began to be a part of the youth department and joined various departments in the church to be active, and I was about eleven years of age in my journey. I felt at home in the Seventh-day Adventist church. I was asked to preach my first sermon a few months after baptism for a youth day. I was at a loss for words because I had never seen someone preach that was so young in my former congregation. The task at hand was nerve shaking. However, the church's first Elder helped prepare me to deliver a powerful word about our Christian duty to help the poor and that the church should be a safe place for individuals to come for help. People were amazed by my preaching and the ability to challenge the congregation to be more Christ-like in everything we do. My sermon touched on the injustices affecting our community and the church's Ministry to provide a safe space for the oppressed. I challenged the church to be vocal on the issues affecting us to liberate the oppressed. I was exposed to social justice issues in my previous church. Hence, I used my biblical foundation from the Adventist church and married both concepts to preach a biblically sound message, geared toward liberating the marginalized from oppressive powers.

Loss of my family

Three years after my baptism, on July 12, 2006, I lost the most important person in my life: my grandfather. My grandfather and I had a healthy relationship; he was my superhero and the person who taught me how to play the sport I adore: basketball. Throughout my journey in high school, I was the basketball captain. I started playing for

my country to obtain a scholarship to an American university and potentially make it to the National Basketball Association. I was passionate about training and working hard, and my grandfather was my biggest supporter in that endeavor. However, on July 12, 2006, in my final year of high school, I received a call at five in the morning. I could hardly understand what was happening, but the person told me to wake my mother and be at a specific location. Rushing into my mother's room and preparing my way to drive to the destination, people just started calling and crying. Upon arriving at the scene, the crowd was enormous; people held their stomachs, wiped their eyes, and wailed uncontrollably.

At this particular moment, I had an experience where I thought God was a fairytale and he didn't exist. I blamed him for the death of my family; I was abandoning God in this painful moment. God had disappointed me for the first time in my life. Growing up in the church, I worshiped God through everything, but the moment God was supposed to save my family, God was silent in heaven without even sending a guardian angel to protect them from death. On that July day in 2006, I lost my Grandfather, Grandmother, Aunt, and Uncle. Four of my family members died in that car accident, but this tragedy allowed me to develop a unique relationship with God. The tragedy led me to create an unfathomable faith when I learned of the death of my family. I distanced myself from God for about five months. I was calm about hearing anything about God; until the evening my local Seventh-day Adventist district of churches hosted an evangelistic series in Old Harbor, Jamaica. Although I was reluctant to attend, a young lady I grew up with invited me to church, and I decided to accept the offer because of our friendship. The preacher, Pastor Everett Smith, was preaching a passionate sermon. He chose to talk

about death and the thief on the cross that Jesus invited into the kingdom of God. He said the thief would be with Him in paradise that day (Luke 23:43). I am not here to talk about the theology of the thief on the cross.

On the other hand, the thief got an invitation to be with Christ. He kept on preaching passionately, "you may have lost your Grandmother, Grandfather, Uncle, and Aunt; God has a space for everyone in this world as long as you believe." I was in tears and disbelief that he could know what to say and understand what I am going through with the questions lingering in my mind about my family's destiny. The preacher appealed his intriguing sermon and asked people to recommit their lives or give them to Jesus Christ. I was in tears at that particular time and knew I had to take that walk to the altar to recommit my life to Christ.

That same night after leaving the church, I went straight home and received a dream that was clear to me, suggesting I should attend Northern Caribbean University to be a Pastor as well. I was troubled and worried at the same time; I would never consider myself a people person, and I viewed myself as having a significant disadvantage. I questioned the person in my dream, wondering if he appeared to be the right person. Then the person reminded me of the accident, and the person said we need to visualize that day, and asked me to tell them what I remembered. Before I could speak, the person said, "Remember your mother was supposed to be in that car with her Father, but you got sick, and she had to pick you up from school?" I was speechless. Then the person continued and said, "Not only your Mother was supposed to be in that car, but you were one of the passengers as well, and a sickness came over you, and they decided to allow your Mother to stay and nurse you while you recuperated from your sickness." That

dream had me in tears and troubled my spirit. I believe that accident was made for my entire family, but I believe God saved some of us to complete God's work. Since that day, I made it my life's duty to preach the Gospel to everyone to spread the good news of Jesus and to never separate the Gospel from social justice.

Theological Education Begins

After high school, my educational journey took me to Northern Caribbean University, where I started my ministerial training. I focused on a Bachelor of Arts in Religion with a minor in Business Administration; after four years, I completed the program. The required courses for the theological program provided both theoretical and practical tools in preparing me for the call to Pastoral Ministry. On the other hand, the minor in Business Administration gave me great insights into creating opportunities for the marginalized and helping overlooked communities. I have always believed that theology and business can be married, what I mean by this is that my education prepared me to combine ideas, innovations, and services in order to help meet the needs of communities. To feed the community spiritually, we must provide physical solutions. Hence, coupling the theological training with the business aspect better equips me to give opportunities to the members of my community, helping them find a way out of their current predicaments, such as poverty, which leads to crime and violence.

During this period in 2008, I was active in my home congregation. I served in various departments as a Youth leader, Sabbath school teacher, and youth choir leader, and even got ordained as an Elder for my home congregation. The Ministry was a part of me. I also conducted an evangelistic series and revivals that saw over fifty individuals baptized throughout that period. When we hosted the evangelism class, we decided to

travel to Honduras for an evangelistic series for three weeks. During this time, we saw over two hundred individuals give their life to Jesus Christ on that trip.

On the other hand, that trip allowed me to think more intentionally about the Seventh-day Adventist church doctrines and their evangelistic priority. The sermons were prepared for us in Spanish and English; the church focused more on the doctrines' importance and neglected what was happening in Honduras in 2011. The violence, poverty, and the outflow of migrants and asylum seekers were ignored to accommodate doctrinal importance. We dismissed their struggles, fights, and fears to incorporate our agenda. The people were struggling, and we came in giving them spiritual food without considering empowering them in ways that could have helped economically, physically, and mentally. Our focus was on preparing people for a good afterlife, which in retrospect neglected their real suffering and allowed for injustice to continue unchecked. This inadequacy in addressing the suffering of the Honduran people in the here and now contributed to my love for equity and my desire for all people to receive equal treatment. However, it also uncovered how my church was silent on issues affecting the oppressed, such as poverty, police brutality, and racism. The experience in Honduras raised some critical questions for me regarding the church's priority in preaching the Gospel and keeping church doctrine. All we care about is telling people what to do rather than helping them with their actual problems and experiences of racism, sexism, poverty, and violence in the world outside the church. We don't care about the now; we care about the after. The church was all about the head, but no heart, my quest for change increased each day to preach the whole Gospel and show that Jesus is a liberator for oppressed .

Theological Education Continues

Although I was passionate about Ministry, my thirst for knowledge was inevitable. Academia helped me achieve my purpose in life and prepared me to provide better service to where I was placed. Preaching had always been a love for me growing up in churches with phenomenal preaching ministries. During this time, I served All Nations Seventh-day Adventist Church as a student pastor, preaching in various states in America each week. I would travel each week and still engage in multiple ministries at All Nations Seventh-day Adventist church. However, I was missing more and wanted to do more than the Churches offered. I wanted to learn how to prepare sermons to challenge members to care about social justice issues affecting the black members in our denomination. The church was silent on the problems for a long time, and it seemed the seminary was calm about it. The seminary was intellectually grounded on the work of Ellen G. White, exegesis, hermeneutics, and other doctrines of the church. However, it distanced itself from social justice issues, and I was again searching for more. I wanted to learn how to provide stimulating sermons that will speak to the problems people are faced with each day.

Having a deep desire to learn more about the justice system, I enrolled at Queens College in the paralegal studies program to learn how to be knowledgeable in law in order to better serve the mistreated. The paralegal study was exciting and almost persuaded me to attend law school. However, I enrolled in a Master of Science in Community and International Development at Andrews University to gain expertise in community development. I was eager to be more proficient and knowledgeable about subjects that are relevant to social justice issues in this post-modern era. I wanted to be

well-rounded, and I realized that this degree could undoubtedly provide me with the requisite skills to best integrate practical ministerial experiences with biblically sound messages that create an atmosphere of just treatment for all our members.

After finishing that degree at Andrews University, I searched for progressive seminaries in America. My thirst for academia grew stronger each day, and I wanted to be an intelligent, biblically grounded, and knowledgeable social justice preacher. Drew University was always a dream since I was a little boy in Jamaica because of Dr. Althea Spencer Miller, a Jamaican scholar and Dr. Jerry Carter a famous Baptist preacher, who completed his PhD at Drew University. Hence, I enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Drew Theological Seminary in summer 2019. The pursuit of this degree arose out of a deep desire to be relevant, just, and exegetically skilled when preaching. Social justice was the passion that started to overflow within me, and I wanted to explore these options at Drew Theological Seminary, working with the best minds to make this a reality. Learning at Drew has been my greatest blessing in academia. I have learned to treat people equitably. Drew Theological Seminary stretched my mind and allowed me to read a myriad of books, such as *Between the World and Me*, *God of the Oppressed*, *Tears We Cannot Stop* and many more, that I neglected throughout my Andrews journey. Also, Drew Theological Seminary did not impose its doctrinal belief on me but allowed me to think critically about every subject I undertook. Obtaining this degree will equip me to be better and make a tremendous change in the lives of my members and even in the Seventh-day Adventist church. This degree will give me the knowledge I desire to teach and preach social justice sermons that are biblical and just. It would also propel me to be

equipped to handle the Gospel of Luke in a liberating way and read the text through a different experience than previously read.

The Adventist Doctrine of Social Justice

Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist church has been silent on the social justice issues affecting its members. The church enforces doctrines, policies, and procedures yet fail to recognize when its community is bleeding because of the injustices it has experienced. We are silent because we believe church and state should be separate, and Jesus is the answer to all our problems. The Adventist website clearly warns its believers of the dangers of going into politics, asserting that

Adventists may properly aspire to serve in positions of civil leadership. Nevertheless, we must remain ever mindful of the dangers that are associated with religious influence on civil affairs and assiduously avoid such dangers.⁴

If an unarmed black man is murdered by a police officer, the church is silent. The church remains silent and preaches the church's doctrines while ignoring the people's outcry. We want people to come to our churches, but we do not understand what they are experiencing. We do not participate in peaceful protests nor hold politicians accountable. Black residents of Murfreesboro, NC, are more likely to be victims of Police brutality than white residents. However, the Seventh-day Adventist church distances itself from the issues that burden the people. In this initial chapter, I will appeal to the church to speak out on social justice issues and develop trust and relationships with the people they minister to, in order to show them God cares about the oppressed. To this end, James Cone asserts, "to know God is to experience the acts of God in the concrete affairs and

⁴ "Church-State Relations," Adventist.org, last modified March 1, 2002, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.adventist.org/documents/church-state-relations/>.

relationships of people, liberating the weak and the helpless from pain and humiliation."⁵ With Cone's words in mind, this initial chapter seeks to foster an atmosphere of empowerment within my Adventist congregation. I anticipate that the congregation will initially be hesitant for the radical shift that I am postulating; however, a small portion will welcome the change if it is beneficial to the community and encourages Christian growth. The burden of proof will be upon me to show the communal and individual changes that might emerge when introducing the congregation to a new interpretation of the gospel that focuses on social justice.

My Ministerial Context

I first started this project when I was living in Atlantic City New Jersey and pastoring a church in that area. The church was relatively diverse, with a Caribbean majority. I was excited and wanted to see how social justice preaching might impact the Adventist church in ways I have wanted to since I am a child. This was very important to me since I am a Caribbean-American man. Growing up in the Caribbean, we were extremely conservative with our views on social justice and would not dream of bringing politics in the Seventh-day Adventist church. My perception was that I would be getting a lot of resistance with my sermons, especially from the older Caribbean members at the Pleasantville Seventh-day Adventist church. I was awaiting a challenge and preparing to explain the importance of social justice preaching in our current climate.

However, I got called to Pastor down South, in North Carolina, with a population that is predominantly African American with many of the members having

⁵ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Obris Books, 1997), 110.

lived to hear of lived experiences of slavery from their grand-parents or great-grand-parents. These members were open about social justice and welcomed the idea of such a project because of their African American heritage, and the fact that many of them were still suffering with racism in their everyday lives. Murfreesboro has a history of slavery, which continues to affect the economics of the town, in which you can still see cotton fields and wealthy whites are mainly responsible for jobs. The mayor, Mrs. Stephens came to the church recently on a community guest day and shared that the community needs African American leadership because the boards and decision-making counsels are predominately white.

This shift in ministry context helped me to better frame my questions and the implementation of my work was accepted by my new congregation. In fact, the Murfreesboro congregation helped me to understand social justice even more. For example, the members were rich in history and understanding of the struggles of being black in America. This regional knowledge more thoroughly acquainted me with relevant topics upon which to preach, in order to assess the effectiveness of social justice preaching in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The shift in context did a great deal for me because the context does matter. To this end, my academic adviser, Dr. Gary Simpson expressed to me that

The matters of social justice activists preaching are about understanding and discerning what the challenges are in any given community and then addressing that not only in the pulpit but in concretized ways in the community itself. In many ways, social justice preaching is intensively grounded in an understanding of the complexities of living in any particular space, place, or time and the resultant systemic and systematic ways that injustice festers within those specifics.⁶

⁶ Rev, Dr. Gary Simpson, 2022. Email Correspondence, April 13.

Finding the challenges in the Murfreesboro community was not at all time-consuming because of its well documented history of the injustices perpetrated against Black and Brown people. The members were eager to hear sermons that relate to their experiences and call for a higher standard of living. Members wanted to know that their pastor understands their experience, their struggles and the context of the injustices they face. They wanted to know how God cares for them while they are suffering and being marginalized because of the color of their skin. This southern context differed greatly from when I started in Atlantic City with a majority of the members being more doctrinally conservative given their roots in the Caribbean experience.

In Murfreesboro, the Head Elder shared the church's history and shared with me that his father was one of the church's founders. He recalled that

Howard Everette, 72, was a Baptist church member for 55 years. He was a prominent deacon in his church. About 1955, a young student came his way in Northampton County, North Carolina, selling books to earn a scholarship to attend college. "The fact that he was white did not matter to me," Everette said, "so long as he was doing something good to help himself. So, he ordered the book entitled Daniel and the Revelation." Everette tacitly hoped that he would not return with the book, but that did not happen. Upon delivery of the book several months later, the young man gave him a card and asked him to fill it out and mail it. "You will receive a Bible study and send them in."⁷

He was extremely passionate about the conversation and continued saying

The young man replied. A Bible study course from the Voice of Prophecy started coming not many weeks later. With a family of eight girls and six boys, a wife, and all that goes with keeping them happy with no means of support except a small farm, a man has very little extra time to study the Bible. However, after the family went to bed at night, he would sit up with his kerosene lamp from about ten to twelve o'clock and study those lessons. The lessons kept coming anyway until he graduated and received a certificate. "He thought that was the end of it," Everette remembers. The children grew up and started to travel. Arthur and Dorothy went to New York City in the early '60s. They studied with Rosalee

⁷ James Everette, 2022. Interview by author. Murfreesboro, NC. February 5.

Jones, the Bible counselor of the Ephesus SDA Church, in the Harlem area of New York City.⁸

The burning question and desire in the hearts of these young people now were, how can they get this newfound treasure back to their parents in Murfreesboro.

One thing was sure; they must share their faith with their loved ones. Arthur and Dorothy approached Rosalee Jones on the matter, asking her to spend a week of her vacation at their homes teaching their families the message. Mrs. Jones returned to New York, and Kelly Bishop of the Roanoke Rapids SDA Church continued the studies in Murfreesboro. Finally, Mrs. Jones returned and spent two weeks giving Bible studies in a one-room church in Murfreesboro- Eight persons were baptized in the Roanoke Rapids church, including Howard Everette and his wife, Mary.⁹

James Everette remembers that

In 1977, Mrs. Jones and her New Believers Choir (NBC) solicited funds amounting to \$750.00 in New York and went to Murfreesboro, where they gave a concert in the high school auditorium, raising \$1,000.00. They added that to the \$750.00 to start a church building on a tract of land, which Everette donated. Rosalee Jones informed R. L. Woodfork, then president of the South Atlantic Conference, of the strong interest in Murfreesboro. He, in turn, sent James Best, pastor of Durham, NC, to Murfreesboro to see what was there. Best arrived in Murfreesboro, where he knew no one, went into a phone booth, and started to look up the phone number of Howard Everette. Everette, who lived several miles out of town, was just walking by the phone booth when the Spirit of the Lord said to him, "That man is looking for you." He stopped, turned back to the phone booth, and asked the stranger whom he was looking for. Best answered and said, "I am looking for Mr. Howard Everette." Everette said, "I am he." When the 150-seat church was opened on December 15, 1979, there were 30 members; the Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist church was the name given to the church.¹⁰

The Community

The community of Murfreesboro is predominantly African American; Caucasians are a minority in the community. The population is approximately three thousand one

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ James Everette, Interview by the author at Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist church, February 5, 2022.

¹⁰ Ibid.

hundred; a few of the significant injustices in Murfreesboro are Gender equality, poverty, crime, and violence, while the African American complains about excessive force by the Police. The data suggest that the “gender living in poverty is women. Women are making significantly less than males”¹¹ in the Murfreesboro area. Hence, gender equality is essential for women to be getting the same pay as men who are doing the same work. Women want to be valued as men when working assiduously to provide for their families. Poverty is a massive concern in small-town because more than “twenty percent of the population lives in poverty.”¹² The major hiring opportunities are in education, health and retail; which is mostly controlled by white men in the community even though they are a minority in Murfreesboro. They are minority but still controlled the money flow in the community. Therefore, Blacks are still seeking employment and denied promotion, managerial position and high paying offices because the whites are at the top positions in these respected fields.

African Americans in the community of Murfreesboro believe that Police are using excessive force when dealing with them and will be quick to be arrested if they question the cruel intentions of the police officer. Many senior residents will argue that drugs are the root cause of police presence in the community. To this end, a Murfreesboro Police brutality lawyer stated that

Excessive force and the use of firearms negatively impact relationships between police and the communities they serve. When police officers in Murfreesboro, North Carolina, develop positive relations and are perceived as professional, caring, and fair to all, regardless of race, gender or religion, officers and communities benefit from mutual respect and trust. This positive interaction allows law enforcement personnel to perform their duties confidently with the knowledge that they have community support. In theory, reductions in excessive force encounter

¹¹ “Data USA,” last modified May 1, 2022, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/murfreesboro-nc>.

¹² Ibid.

effectively build trust and create an effective police-minority relationship. Other forms of police brutality include racial and gender bias-based profiling, sexual abuse/harassment, false arrest, and illegal search and seizure activities, all of which may lead to excessive force action.¹³

Lawyers called for fair treatment of everyone in the community and encouraged law enforcement to positively impact society. The Black residents were distraught and suggested that

they are still illegal actions against citizens in Murfreesboro, North Carolina, and includes the use of excessive force without justifiable cause, use of a lethal weapon without cause, arresting through discrimination and racial profiling, physically and verbally harassing citizens, selectively enforcing laws based on the officer's desires, bribing lawmakers, witness tampering, tampering with evidence, false arrest, sexual misconduct.¹⁴

The African American community just wanted to be treated equally in Murfreesboro. They were giving the history of the neighborhood where members from the Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist church can vividly remember being a slave. The abuses of power by the police towards African American residents is reflective of America's racist history and institutions. Acknowledging this history is the first step towards changing these unjust systems that make black residents feel inferior to the white men with power.

In recent years, police brutality against African American men and women has garnered national attention. Take, for instance, the recent murder of Botham Jean, an African American man who was eating ice cream in his apartment when a white female police officer entered his apartment and killed him. The white female police officer walked into his apartment thinking it was her own and shot Botham. "She was his

¹³ "Murfreesboro NC Police Brutality Lawyers," last modified June 17, 2020, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://police-brutality.usattorneys.com/north-carolina/murfreesboro/>

¹⁴ Ibid.

neighbor and an off-duty police officer."¹⁵ However, the argument that started circulating in the media blamed him for his death. The police went into the wrong apartment, killed an innocent man, and argued for her innocence on the basis of “stand your ground” laws. A similar case took place in Texas when, "Atatianna Jefferson was playing video games with her nephew in her own home, but a white policeman decided he was above the law by entering her home without announcing himself and shooting her through her window."¹⁶ She died and was blamed for her death. The media blames African American people for their deaths. In 2014, Eric Garner, whose only crime was "selling loose cigarettes was placed in a chokehold by a white Police officer until he died, all the while saying 'I can't breathe."¹⁷ However, because he was a big black man, he was treated worse than an animal, and the police refused to let him breathe. "He died and was blamed for his death."¹⁸

These three stories are just a few of the many more names we can remember who were abused by white Police officers. They were unarmed, but the police claimed they were fearful for their lives. Hence, it leads me to conclude that Black people are perceived as a threat in the United States of America. The reason for my conclusion stems from the consistent violent acts perpetrated against Black and Brown Bodies in

¹⁵ A. B. C. News, “Death of an Innocent Man: Timeline of Wrong-Apartment Murder Trial of Amber Guyger,” ABC News, October 2, 2019, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/death-innocent-man-timeline-wrong-apartment-murder-trial/story?id=65938727>.

¹⁶ Marina Trahan Martinez, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, and Dave Montgomery, “Woman Was Playing Video Game with Her Nephew When Shot by Fort Worth Police,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 2019, accessed April 1, 2022, U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/13/us/fort-worth-texas-shooting-jefferson.html>.

¹⁷ History, “Eric Garner Dies in NYPD Chokehold,” July 17, 2014, accessed June 9, 2021, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/eric-garner-dies-nypd-chokehold>.

¹⁸ “Opinion, "The Death of Eric Garner: Assessing Blame," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2019, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/18/opinion/letters/eric-garner-afghanistan-arizona.html>.

America by white authoritative individuals and institutions. Black and Brown Bodies have been brutalized throughout this country's history, police brutality is a byproduct of this tragic history. The author Ta- Nehasi Coates, in his famous book *Between the World and Me*, attempts to prepare his son to survive in America. He writes, "I would like you to know; in America, it is tradition to destroy the black body- it is heritage."¹⁹ Police can go unpunished by using the word "fear." All these African American brothers and sisters who died at the hands of white police were victimized because they were of the wrong skin tone. Later in this project, I will return to these stories of police brutality in my development of a series of sermons based on a portion of the Gospel of Luke, in which Luke's Jesus is preaching a gospel of Social Justice and fights against the imperial power of Rome.²⁰

These stories bring into context the history of the Police department and the reasons it was created. Black and Brown people have been fearful of the Police since its genesis because of the negative foundation upon which it was created: slave patrols. To this end, the NAACP notes that

The earliest formal slave patrol was created in the Carolinas in the early 1700s with one mission: to establish a system of terror and squash slave uprisings with the capacity to pursue, apprehend, and return runaway slaves to their owners. Tactics included the use of excessive force to control and produce desired slave behavior.²¹

¹⁹ Ta-Nehasi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2015), 132.

²⁰ See Appendix D, sermon 1 and 2.

²¹ "The Origins of Modern-Day Policing," last modified 2022, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/origins-modern-day-policing>.

The Police department has its genesis in capturing runaway slaves and bringing them back to their masters through the use of excessive force. In their book *Policing: A Text/Reader*, Dr. Archbold provides the history of policing and its brutal tactics.

Slave patrols were known for their high level of brutality and ruthlessness as they maintained control over the slave population. The members of slave patrols were usually White males (occasionally a few women) from every echelon in the social strata ranging from very poor individuals to plantation owners that wanted to ensure control over their slaves. Slave patrols remained in place during Civil War and were not completely disbanded after slavery ended. During early Reconstruction, several groups merged with what was formerly known as slave patrols to maintain control over African American Citizens. Groups such as the federal military, the state militia, and the Ku Klux Klan took over the responsibilities of earlier slave patrols and were known to be even more violent than their predecessors.²²

This history might push some Americans to question the motto of ‘protect and serve’ and helps to explain why overpoliced black and brown neighborhoods have a disconnect with and a fear towards the Police. Blacks have been struggling with excessive force, ill treatment, and cruel and unjust treatment for over four hundred years and seems to almost always be victims of police killing or brutality.

The History Of The Seventh-Day Adventist Church

This section will offer a brief history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, focusing on its role, relevance, and reaction to major racial unrest in the United States during the summer of 2020 and the corresponding ecclesiastical shifts among Seventh-day Adventists globally. The chapter looks at the church's history within two broad periods: A brief history of the Seventh-day Adventist church from its founding to our current state. I have chosen to use this type of periodization to situate the Seventh-Day Adventist church's engagement in social justice because it allows for more apparent

²² Carol A. Archbold, *Policing: A Text/Reader* (SAGE, 2012) , 5.

contrasts, that is, to explore to what extent has the church been involved in social justice work and how its views and approach have changed in response to the national conversation around police brutality and police reform. The church in which I serve could benefit significantly from learning about both the history of policing in America as well as the Seventh-day Adventist church's history with regard to social injustice.

The Adventist church received a new shift in thinking during the summer of 2020 mainly as a result of the death of George Floyd, who was murdered while in Police custody.²³ Black and Brown people throughout the United States and a few other countries were furious at how vicious the Police treated Floyd, with one officer kneeling on his neck for almost nine minutes. The White Police officer had no care in the world about what people around him were shouting and the constant pleading calling for his mother, repeating he could not breathe. George Floyd's death sparked a fire in African American Adventists throughout North America; Adventists started protesting and marching for equal treatment for Black people. Many Adventists that were silent on issues of injustices were now vocal when they saw the video recording of Floyd's murder. Conferences started to speak out, which created civil unrest, and demanded accountability; eventually the officers were arrested and charged.

Regional (Black) Conferences and White conferences came together in solidarity in the Adventist church, young black Adventist people were tired of being silent and demanded we be treated equally:

²³ Evan Hill et al., "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>.

On Sabbath (Saturday), June 20, 2020, hundreds of Seventh-day Adventist youth and young adults took to the streets of Minneapolis with “A Cry for Justice and Healing,” an outreach event aimed at rebuilding the city and regaining a sense of peace. In the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder on May 25, the event was attended by more than 350 volunteers, members of 16 Adventist churches, and officials from three conferences (Lake Region, Central States, and Minnesota Conference). The day began with a gathering on the steps of Minneapolis First Seventh-day Adventist Church, located eight minutes’ drive from the spot where Floyd’s life was taken. In place of a traditional Sabbath worship service, volunteers (most under age 35) dispersed to one of seven outreach locations in Minneapolis. Each station had a unique mission tailored to the needs and demographics of the neighborhood. All offered supplies, lunches, prayers, and a place to submit ideas of ways churches can sustain aid after the media attention subsides and police brutality is no longer a trending topic. Participants regrouped for a peaceful march to the George Floyd memorial located at East 38th Street and Chicago Avenue (renamed George Floyd Avenue).²⁴

The young Seventh-day Adventists took church to the streets and started marching for justice. The same church that always tries to be silent on issues that deal with the world and focus on the Bible and doctrines recognizes that they have to stand for something and demand equitable treatment for black people in the United States of America. The Adventist crowd was marching and chanting “I can’t breathe!” and Dr. Abraham Henry, a director from the conference, gave a powerful charge:

Today we walk because we believe we’re walking humbly; today, we talk because we are seeking justice, and today we stand because we stand for those who can’t stand. Remember this moment as a day where we stood up, a day where we spoke up, and a day where we command that we seek justice.

Other leaders of the march noted the influence of Adventist youth, stating that “They kept on asking, ‘What can we do?’ In Zoom townhalls, they would ask: ‘We know what the

²⁴ “Hundreds of Minneapolis Adventist Youth March for Justice and Healing | Adventist Review,” July 3, 2020, <https://adventistreview.org/news/hundreds-of-minneapolis-adventist-youth-march-for-justice-and-healing/>.

world does, but what does the Adventist Church do?"²⁵ The Seventh-day Adventist Church decided that the world was doing something, and they wanted to be a part of this call for equality among black people. The church recognizes that sitting on the sidelines will never resolve issues that systemically affect black and brown people in America.

Brief History of The Seventh-Day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist church is derived from the Millerites movement of the nineteenth century. A farmer from Lou Hampton, New York, Williams Miller eagerly anticipated furthering his education from an early age. However, he was the eldest of sixteen children. The financial burden of higher education was terrifying to his family, knowing that money was scarce for such an undertaking while rearing other children. The farmer did not allow finance to deter his life, "Miller married a young lady from Poultney, Vermont at the age of twenty-one. He took advantage of the village library. His scholarly interests brought him into contact with the local village intellectuals who were mostly deists."²⁶ William Miller was well known as a Baptist minister. "He was born into a Christian home and later abandoned his religious conviction for deism in the first years of the nineteenth century."²⁷ Moreover, William Miller converted back to Christianity after careful, systematic studying of the scriptures and decided to find the answer of the coming Messiah. Like many of his generation, "he felt impelled to study the Bible, and, also like many, he was converted or reconverted to Christianity as the Second Great Awakening revitalized the American churches."²⁸

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000), 19.

²⁷ George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-Day Adventists* (Review and Herald Publishing Associated, 1999), 13.

²⁸ Ibid., 14.

Miller was passionate about studying the Bible; he started researching the word of God and comparing scripture with scripture as he looked. He reached all the scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, methodologically. He was zealous for the word of God. "For two years (1816-1818), Miller studied his Bible intensively in this way. Finally, he came to "the solemn conclusion ... that in about twenty-five years from that time [i.e., 1843] all the affairs of our present state would be wound up" and Christ would come."²⁹ Miller was very sure that Christ was going to come at that time by studying prophecies, especially Daniel 8:14: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."³⁰ The Adventist church has always been a denomination that systematically takes pride in studying prophecies and the Bible. Operating on the commonly accepted understanding of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:5, 6, that a day in prophecy equals a year, Miller calculated that the 2300-day prophecy would conclude in 1843. This was the date Miller set that Jesus would return. He was adamant that Christ would come in that year and went around the country preaching about the second coming of Jesus Christ. A few pastors accepted Miller's prophecy and began sharing that we need to prepare to be with Jesus as Christians.

Miller's most significant ministerial "convert was Joshua V. Himes of the Christian connexion."³¹ Himes was aggressive in his approach and got Williams Miller opportunities to travel to major cities and towns to preach the Advent of Christ. Himes used his influence to open doors for Miller to share his knowledge about the second coming of Jesus; he used the printed page to ensure that by 1844 the Advent message

²⁹ Schwarz and Greenleaf, 20.

³⁰ Andrews University Press, *Andrews Study Bible: Light. Depth. Truth* (Andrews University Press, 2010).

³¹ Knight, 16.

would be shared globally. Hatch postulates that in 1835, "William Miller and the Adventists had begun an unprecedented media blitz, producing an estimated four million pieces of literature within four years."³² Knight states that "Himes's ingenuity saw to it that by 1844 the Advent doctrine had received a hearing around the world. He utilized several avenues to fulfill his mission of warning the globe that Christ would come about the year 1843 and that the hour of his judgment has come."³³

While Millerite Adventism was waiting on the return of Christ in 1843, their message spread across the world. Many Christians resigned from their jobs, sold their property, and readied themselves to see the savior face to face. They were confident that Jesus would come on this day, the excitement was uncontrollable, and celebration was heightened. They were patiently waiting for the coming of Jesus in 1843. The camp meeting was happening each year leading up to 1843; the "Miller tent was the largest in the United States and had a seating capacity for up to 4000 people."³⁴ The year came and passed, and Jesus didn't come. Miller was left in agony and depression. He realized that the date he suggested was not the date Jesus appeared. He started apologetically writing to Himes; Himes decided that the people needed an explanation and some sort of comfort for disappointing the majority of Christians who held the belief that Jesus would come in 1843 or the definite date "set between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844, according to the Jewish calendar."³⁵ The disappointment was painful until a preacher at a camp meeting in New Hampshire in mid-August 1844 reinterpreted Miller's argument and

³² Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989), 63. See also, Rev 14: 7.

³³ Knight, 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

decided that the year was correct, but the month was incorrect. A Millerite preacher, namely S. S. Snow, "convincingly demonstrated through a variety of mathematical calculations that the fulfillment of the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 would take place in the autumn of 1844."³⁶ Snow predicted that Daniel's prophecy, which speaks of the cleansing of the Sanctuary would finally be completed at the time of the Jewish Atonement, that "is on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish year."³⁷ Miller was electrified by learning about the new date and pleased that the year he put forward was correct just the month needed to be adjusted. The camp meeting was exciting; the Christians gathered for two months to get their affair in order and prepare to meet their maker. News traveled throughout America, and people were just overjoyed preparing to meet the Lord on October 22, 1844, the date snow concluded that Jesus would return. "On October 22, tens of thousands of believers lingered in expectation of the appearance of Jesus in the clouds, while countless others waited in doubt, fearing that the Millerites might be correct."³⁸ The day came, and Jesus didn't appear, and it left the Millerite Adventists considerably disappointed. Hence, October 22, 1844, is the great disappointment in Seventh-day Adventist history.

Founding of The Seventh-Day Adventist Church to Our Current State

On October 22, 1844, a roller coaster of emotions engulfed and almost abolished the Advent believers. They were terrified and humiliated about their faith and how wrong they were in believing that they could predict the day Jesus would come. For example, a Methodist farmer from Port Gibson, New York, named Hiram Edson, had become an

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ See Leviticus 23:27.

³⁸ Knight, 50.

Adventist in 1843. Edson's first reaction on the night of the "October 22 Disappointment" was to question God and the Bible. After a little reflection, however, he recognized that his days awaiting the Advent had been the richest and brightest of all my Christian experience."³⁹ His reflection got the sparks and conversation that allowed people to get zealous in preparing for the coming of the Lord. The great disappointment caused many Seventh-day Adventists to doubt the prophetic voice of the preachers, and many were resentful toward the movement. However, Hiram Edson had a vision and inspired believers in the Port Gibson, New York area to keep the faith. Samuel London Jr. postulates that:

In the aftermath of the Great Disappointment, some of Miller's followers remained convinced of the accuracy of his calculation. On the 23rd of October, the day following the Great Disappointment, Hiram Edson (1806–1882), leader of the Advent movement in Port Gibson, New York, claimed to have experienced a vision while walking through a cornfield. Edson reported seeing what appeared to be a sanctuary, or temple, in the heavens. Within this structure were two distinct compartments. Moreover, he saw a man clothed in priestly garments passing from one compartment of the sanctuary, or temple, into the other compartment.⁴⁰

This theological thinking started spreading throughout the region, and people began to believe in the notion that something took place on October 22, 1844. They began to study the scripture when Hiram Edson shared his vision; the people wanted to find clues in the Bible that would explain this vision and find comfort in knowing that William Miller was right about something that took place on the great disappointment.

Within a short span of time, the thoughts of Hiram Edson; Franklin B. Hahn, a physician; and O. R. L. Crozier, a schoolteacher, reverted to a phrase found in Daniel 8:14, the same passage that introduced the prophecy of the "two thousand and three hundred days." The latter portion of the verse reads, "then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." In his vision, Edson reported seeing a building, or edifice,

³⁹ Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000), 41.

⁴⁰ Samuel G. London Jr, *Seventh-Day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010), 17.

which had the appearance of a sanctuary or temple. Another important component of the vision was the man who passed from one compartment, or room, of the structure into the other. More telling, however, was the manner in which this man was attired. According to Edson, this man's priestly garments had an uncanny resemblance to those worn by Jewish high priests in the earthly tabernacle of Old Testament times.⁴¹

Therefore, it was concluded that Edson's vision was right; something took place on October 22, 1844. Hahn, Crozier, and Edson were adamant in carefully studying the scriptures, mainly Revelation, Hebrews, and Leviticus, to conclude that Jesus moved from the Holy place to the Most Holy place. This action that Jesus performed was essential because it signified the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. The typology of the earthly sanctuary and the duties it serves, that is, "the Jewish high priest would visit the Most Holy Place only on the Day of Atonement to cleanse or purify the tabernacle and the people of their sins."⁴² This concept of the earthly sanctuary resonated with Hahn and Crozier, and they found in Revelation that a sanctuary is in heaven. Hence, Hahn and Crozier believed that "Jesus entered the Most Holy Place on or near the date of October 22, 1844, to commence cleansing the heavenly sanctuary and his people from their sins."⁴³ The Adventist believers started spreading that something happened in 1844, and though Jesus didn't come on that prescribed day, He did something for us on that day and is even doing it now. The Adventists started teaching this core theological opinion and held to their belief system that Jesus moved from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place and interceded on our behalf with the Father. The Adventist believers developed the

⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴² Ibid., 27.

⁴³ Ibid.

doctrines of the Sanctuary, which is one of the pillars of our faith and the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

During the civil war, the co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist, Ellen G. White, was focused on emancipation. White was integral in the equal treatment of all people despite skin color. She was outspoken and would speak publicly and in her printed words of the demonic acts of treating an ethnic group inferior to another. She postulated that "Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognized as equal in the sight of God."⁴⁴ She was tired of the racial injustice in her presence, knowing black people are not just low-grade, but they can make decisions by themselves without white oversight. They must be able to worship freely without feeling insecure and inadequate. Ellen White's son Edson White was instrumental in informing of the "Regional Conference"⁴⁵ that allows black and brown people to worship God freely and is unafraid of oppressive behaviors.

Aside from White, other founders were critical of slavery and spoke out boldly against the practice. Seventh-day Adventists also "petitioned against southern slavery and northern racism. For example, Joseph and Prudence Bates were leading abolitionists in Fairhaven, Massachusetts during the 1830s and 40s."⁴⁶ From its origins, the Seventh-day

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages Book 2* (Review and Herald Pub Assoc, 2006), 485. Cf. George R. Knight, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Review and Herald Pub. Association, 2001), 145. Here Knight discusses that White was strongly opposed to the idea of enslaving black people, yet she herself was accused of being contradictory when she suggested "let the white believers and the colored believers assemble in separate places of worship."

⁴⁵ The Regional Conference is Black operated conferences within the Seventh-day Adventist church.

⁴⁶ Kevin M. Burton, "The Seventh-Day Adventist Pioneers and Their Protest Against Systemic Racism," NAD Ministerial, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.nadministerial.com/stories/2020/6/18/the-seventh-day-adventist-pioneers-and-their-protest-against-systemic-racism>.

Adventists church has been vocal on issues of injustice, which has subsequently made the movement attractive by treating people fairly. The pioneers were deeply rooted in social justice issues and preached sermons to challenge the status quo. In addition to this, Black Seventh-day Adventists were in the abolitionists' movement. To this end, Dr. Kevin Burton posits that:

the anti-slavery cause was rooted in black protest, and black Seventh-day Adventists were also active abolitionists. John "the Dominie" W. West, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, a former slave and close friend of Gerrit Smith, preached against the evils of slavery and racism, published and promoted several of Smith's abolitionist works, and operated a store in Peterboro, New York, that sold no products grown by slave labor. In Bath, New York, Elias and Henrietta Platt were local Adventist leaders and the most active abolitionists in their town. Elias served as the local agent for Frederick Douglass' *The North Star* and operated a free-produced store like West. The Platts regularly hosted traveling abolitionists. In January 1852, the Platts hosted James and Ellen White in their home during a time when virtually all-white northerners refused to publicly associate with blacks. When Elias Platt died unexpectedly in 1854, Frederick Douglass wrote his obituary, stating that Platt was one of the most devoted, honest, and persevering friends of his people in the State of New York.⁴⁷

During the civil war, the Seventh-day Adventist movement was not stagnant or silent but outspoken and bold on issues of injustice. The Adventists were unafraid and fought for what they believed. Joseph and Prudence Bates were outspoken and brave in abolishing slavery. They "signed and circulated petitions to abolish slavery and prevented the annexation of new slave states, urged the United States to recognize Haiti's independence, and helped abolish racial segregation on trains and the law against interracial marriage in Massachusetts."⁴⁸ In the 1850s and 60s, Adventists petitioned against more issues, like the death penalty, believing that both slavery and capital

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Adventist Review, "Joseph Bates and Adventism's Radical Roots," last modified March 3, 2020, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.adventistreview.org/joseph-bates-and-adventisms-radical-roots>.

punishment "represented systems of brutality that coerced individuals," the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854)."⁴⁹ Throughout 1860 the Seventh-day Adventists would generally disrupt the status quo by placing the denomination's name on petitions they would write and circulate throughout the entire community. The pioneers were very involved in the civil activity and the fight against injustice within the Seventh-day Adventist movement. The pioneers fought against oppressive power and system to ensure a safe environment for Black and Brown bodies. The American Government was held accountable, and the Adventists joined movements to pressure the government to treat people fairly and equally.

⁴⁹ Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776-1865: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776-1865* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1989), 157.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preaching on social justice issues in the Seventh-day Adventist church has recently been a new phenomenon with a few Black pastors in the Adventist church. On the one hand, Pastors Jaime Kowlessar, Charles Wesley Knight, Myron Edmonds, Dr. Dedrick Blue, and Dr. Abraham Jules, a few prominent pastors in the denomination, have called truth to power without the fear of consequences because of this new sound. The Seventh-day Adventist church has held its unique position in preaching Jesus and the church's doctrines without focusing on what is happening in our community, even though our doctrine¹ has elements of social justice. We cushion our theology by finding biblical examples which suggest that "Christians should be in the world but not of the world (1 John 2:16); that we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. That we should put forth the praises of him, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). However, we cannot hide behind these biblical texts without looking at its deeper context.

Recently at our General Conference meeting, in trying to understand our impact, we discovered that people are not so favorable of us as Seventh-day Adventists, as exemplified by the headline "People don't like us."² Could it be that people do not like the Adventist church because we neglect what they consider essential? They constantly teach and preach the doctrines but ignore the systematic racism happening? Could people not like us because we have been silent on issues affecting our black and brown brothers and

¹ *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe ...: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005).

² "People Don't Like Us: Day 2 of the North American Division 2021 Year-End Meeting Business Session," *Adventist Today* (blog), November 2, 2021, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://atoday.org/people-dont-like-us-day-2-of-the-north-american-division-2021-year-end-meeting-business-session/>.

sisters? Could people not like us because we are just silent on social justice issues? My denomination has to do much introspection in the Seventh-day Adventist church and favor the community and the people we called to minister. We cannot just keep saying we are peculiar people without acting as peculiar. Peculiar people fight for justice for everyone and want all their brothers and sisters to enjoy the beauty of God. That is, Jesus was peculiar and his first public ministry in Luke 4 was challenging us to care for the marginalize in our communities. In the book *You Can Achieve More*, Desmond Tutu posits that "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."³

The United Nations defines social justice as "the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruit of economic growth."⁴ Therefore, every Christian should care about social justice issues. This is not mainly because the United Nations declares that it should be so, but as our Christian duty to God and our fellowmen. As Christians, we are to be fair and compassionate, in a way that is similar to "Jesus throughout the Gospel of Luke."⁵ Hence, social justice should be in our hearts. Christians should hold the government responsible for the equitable distribution of wealth and justice for all humankind. The United Nations also asserts, "Social justice is not possible without strong and coherent redistributive policies conceived and implemented by public agencies."⁶ On the other hand, David Cohen views social justice advocacy "as the act of pleading, not for

³ Shiv Khera, *You Can Achieve More: Live By Design, Not by Default* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 21.

⁴ United Nations, *Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations* (UN, 2006).

⁵ See Appendix D, Sermon on Luke 6. This sermon addresses poverty and the need for fair and just treatment.

⁶ United Nations, 2006.

one's interests, but the respect and protection of human rights, the respect, and preservation of the dignity of all people from abuse, violence, and humiliation" resulting from acts or policies implemented by "communities and institutions including government, international financial institutions, and multinational corporations."⁷ Christians should be involved in social justice, and preachers should preach on social justice issues in order to challenge the status quo.

The next section will look at Ellen White and Social Justice, The Gospel of Luke and Social Justice, Prophetic preaching, and Liberation preaching. Preaching on social justice issues is very important, and the Seventh-day Adventist church preachers need to preach social justice issues because Ellen White was vocal about social justice; in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus mandates us to care about social justice issues, and I will put forward two theories of preaching social justice sermons.

Ellen White and Social Justice

Ellen White's record of social justice throughout the Seventh-day Adventist church has been controversial and biased. We use her to silence specific issues but avoid using her when she speaks boldly on matters in contrast with our worldview. Many Adventists have been silent on social justice issues, whereas Ellen White speaks out on social issues, which would be a reference in discussion to keep the church silent on the problems and focus on the coming of Jesus Christ.

In one of her holy books, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, she theorizes:

The standard of the golden rule is the true standard of Christianity; anything short of it is deception. A religion that leads men to place a low estimate upon human beings, whom Christ has esteemed of such value as to give Himself for them; a

⁷ David Cohen, Rosa De la Vega, and Gabrielle Watson, *Advocacy for Social Justice: A Global Action and Reflection Guide* (Kumarian Press, 2001), 8.

religion that would lead us to be careless of human needs, sufferings, or rights, is a spurious religion. In slighting the claims of the poor, the suffering, and the sinful, we are proving ourselves, traitors, to Christ. Search heaven and earth, and there is no truth revealed more powerful than which is made manifest in works of mercy to those who need our sympathy and aid. This truth is as it is in Jesus. When those who profess the name of Christ shall practice the principle of the golden rule, the same power will attend the Gospel as in apostolic times.⁸

White spoke out on poverty and the abolition of slavery and even urged believers to care about human rights. It is sinful to treat humans inhumanely when Christ died for all.

Ellen White was in tune with the suffering of the slaves and the improper violation of rights caused by oppressors in the nineteenth century. She did not stay silent on the issues, but she wrote about spreading the situation throughout the churches.

On the other hand, many Adventists would neglect how aggressive she was in speaking about the abolition of slavery. However, they would suggest that we should avoid political issues and focus on Jesus, who is the only one that can offer a solution to the systemic problems of neglect and suffering. Adventists would misinterpret Ellen White's writing in counsels for the church, as she postulates:

God's people have been called out of the world, that they may be separated from the world. It is not safe for them to take sides in politics, whatever preferences they may have. We are entirely out of place when we identify with party interests. Let us not forget that we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are soldiers of the cross of Christ, and our work is to advance the interest of his kingdom.⁹

White reminded the church that our allegiance to God comes first, not our political agenda. However, many Adventists interpret that particular writing to suggest we are

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Review and Herald Pub Assoc, 2000), 136-137.

⁹ "Counsels for the Church — Ellen G. White Writings," accessed November 2, 2021, pp.316, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/19/toc>.

peculiar and should only focus on the kingdom of God, while neglecting the problems we face on earth. Similarly, White also offers that Jesus

attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from the earthly government.¹⁰

Adventists have allowed this quote to be a commandment to speak of Ellen White's opposing involvement in political and social issues. Many Adventists who study the Bible through an academic lens, would quote this and hush the conversations about how bold she was on social matters. However, recently, Dr. Nicholas Miller postulates that:

those who quote this passage as defining all Adventist involvement in public matters overlook the context of the quote. It had to do with a movement we call today Christian Dominionism- believers who seek to establish a theocracy in this world. In describing Christ as keeping "aloof" from earthly governments, Ellen White was highlighting the spiritual mission of the church; but she was not purporting to set out Christians' role and duty as citizens of this world. Elsewhere she dealt with the Christian's role in public morality by the Word and action. In doing so, she revealed that the Gospel and conversion would necessarily lead to the support of public justice, human equality, and social morality.¹¹

Adventists ignore the context of Ellen White's statements, whereby neglecting human sufferings rather than pursuing justice. While we are citizens of heaven, all of us are adopted in the family of Jesus and need to seek justice in the world that we occupy.

To this end, Ellen White cautioned us that

where the laws of men conflict with God's Word and law, we are to obey the Word and law of God, whatever the consequences may be. The laws of our land require

¹⁰ "The Desire of Ages — Ellen G. White Writings," accessed November 2, 2021, pp. 509, <https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/130/toc>.

¹¹Nicholas Miller, "After the Dust Settles: The Church and Public Affairs in 2020," *Lake Union Herald*, January 1, 2021, 24–27.

us to deliver a slave to his Master, we are not to obey, and we much abide the consequences of violating such law.¹²

Ellen White spoke out on the social issues in her day, including slavery and church and state. She posits that:

You have no license from God to exclude the colored people from your places of worship. Treat them as Christ's property, which they are, just as much as yourselves. They should hold membership in the church with the white brethren. Every effort should be made to wipe out the terrible wrong which has been done them.¹³

God inspired her, and she did not avoid engaging with prescient social problems. She was very forceful in telling us to obey God's Word because a "slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master, and man has no right to take God's workmanship into his hands and claim his as his own."¹⁴ Douglas Morgan argues that "a government that protects restores and relieves, but never savors of oppression. The poor especially are to be kindly treated."¹⁵

Ellen White was fair and deliberate in discussing social justice issues. She had no problem with wealthy people, so long as their wealth was not due to injustice. Ellen White commends them and believes they have to help the poor but believes it is not sinful to be wealthy. She states, "there is no sin in being rich if riches are not acquired by injustice. A rich man will not be condemned for having riches, but condemnation rests upon him if the means entrusted to his is spent in selfishness."¹⁶ However, she is firmly

¹² Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts Vol 3 & 4* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Associates, 1945), 42-43.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Associates, 2004), 15.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts Vol 3 & 4*, 43.

¹⁵ Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic: The Public Involvement of a Major Apocalyptic Movement* (University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 53.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Associates, 1969), 266.

against the oppression of the poor at the hands of those with wealth or power. She wrote in a Letter:

How long will the Lord suffer the oppression of the poor that rich men may hoard wealth? These men are heaping together treasures for the last days. Their money is placed where it does no one any good. To add to their millions, they rob the poor, and the cries of the starving are no more to them than the barking dogs. But the Lord marks every act of oppression. No cry of suffering is unheard by Him. Those who today are scheming to obtain more and more money, putting in operation plans that mean to the poor starvation, will in the last great day stand face to face with their deed of oppression and injustice.¹⁷

Ellen White was incisive concerning the treatment of the poor and did not tolerate the rich in a position of power allowing the poor to suffer, or for their labor to benefit the rich. She warned against people who take pleasure in having the poor among us when their generous offer could help alleviate starvation. In our contemporary time, it is fascinating that 6% of wealthy men and women could feed the entire population if they shared their riches. However, people are selfish and choose to build fortunes rather than eradicate starvation. People are interested in traveling to space, buying a private island, overpriced houses, and investments for life rather than helping the community in which they live. In her day, Ellen White was not silent about injustice to the poor; she was very vocal and passionate to tell us that their day will come when they stand face to face before their Lord and savior.

Ellen White was also an advocate for compassion toward the poor, and she was bravely speaking out on how we should treat the poor and the acceptance by God when we extend mercy and compassion to the poor. She understood that the poor we will

¹⁷ *Adventist Review* (Review and Herald Pub. Association, 2003), 13.

always have among us, but it does not mean we should not try and assist the poor when we are in a position of power. She stated in her book *Christian Service*:

Christ regards all acts of mercy, benevolence, and thoughtful consideration for the unfortunate, the blind, the lame, the sick, the widow, and the orphan as done to Himself: and these works are preserved in the heavenly records and will be rewarded. On the other hand, a record will be written in the book against those who manifest the indifference of the priest and the Levite to the unfortunate, and those who take any advantage of the misfortunes of others.¹⁸

She was very passionate about social justice issues and encouraged the church to be concerned about these issues. She even warned the church not to be a cowardly. She was very aggressive in her statement and was willing to be unpopular in speaking on issues that have caused the marginalized to suffer. She spoke out against oppression, the unfair treatment of the poor, and racial discrimination. She was concerned about how the whites treated people of color and she was willing to be ostracized to make her position known. Ellen White penned these words:

I know that what I now speak will bring me into conflict. This I do not covet, for the conflict has seemed to be continuous of late years; but I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone. I must follow in my Master's footsteps. It has become fashionable to look down upon the poor and upon the colored race in particular. But Jesus, the Master, was poor, and He sympathizes with the poor, the discarded, the oppressed, and declares that every insult shown to them is as if shown to Himself.¹⁹

Ellen White believes that "the greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Christian Service: A Compilation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Associates, 2002), 192.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, 10-11.

needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."²⁰ She was adamant that men should be noble and stand for righteousness. Ellen White believed in justice for all, not only for a particular group, ethnicity, race, background, or tribe. She was engaged in inequality for black and brown people and strongly supported social-justice-oriented messages. We have explored Ellen White's commitment to social justice. Let us now focus on the Gospel of Luke and social justice as it pertains to the social action of the modern Adventist church.

The Gospel of Luke and Social Justice

Luke's Jesus was very concerned about social injustice and each step of the way; He would seek to bring a liberating theme to his audience. It is fascinating that in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus's first public sermon, which began his ministry was a sermon about social justice. In this sermon Jesus said,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.²¹

From this verse, the reader can see that Jesus' concern was for the marginalized; he cares for the neglected in his first public sermon. Joseph Fitzmyer points out that the poor "represents the neglected mass of humanity generically."²² Luke uses the Word poor approximately ten times throughout his Gospel. "Particularly enlightening, is that seven out of ten uses of the word 'poor' come within lists of descriptive terms of low status or

²⁰ Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Education* (Pacific Press Publishing Company, 1903), 57.

²¹ Luke 4:18-9. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

²² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Doubleday, 1985), 250.

physical destitution."²³ Jesus wants us to be concerned about the marginalized among us. His first public sermon challenged us to care about the marginalized and not just the fortunate. He has come to bring good news to the poor. The good news will help them navigate this life while fighting; then, he encourages us Christians to liberate them with our voices and our actions throughout his sermon proclamation.

On the other hand, the remaining three uses of the word 'poor' are about persons in need, and of low economic status."²⁴ Jesus wants us to be aware of the poor among us and help them achieve a better life. He is telling us this in his first appearance for public ministry because it is essential to him. He wants us to view the imminent need of our humanity to ensure the poor among us are not overlooked.²⁵ This reveals the need for social justice in our humanity when dealing with vulnerable populations. Jesus incorporates the themes of Jubilee to emphasize the "liberating character of the kingdom he was announcing and bringing into action."²⁶ In the commentary *Feasting on the Gospel*, Jarvis and Johnson posits that,

Jesus' ministry will further proclaim release for the captives from the various forms of demonic, economic, social, and political bondage that oppress them. Jesus will also restore sight to the blind, not only at a physical level but also figuratively reviving the prophetic vision of the year of the Lord's favor.²⁷

He wants us to recognize that the kingdom he wants is a kingdom where equality is paramount and social injustices are eradicated. Jesus's first public sermon challenges us

²³ Cynthia Long Westfall and Bryan R. Dyer, *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church's Urgent Call* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 109.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See Luke 6: 20-21, 38 and Luke 4:16-18.

²⁶ Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 243-4.

²⁷ Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels--Luke, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary* (Presbyterian Publishing Corp, 2014), 237.

to be more concerned about social injustices among us. It challenges us to look after the marginalized and allow equality to be supreme.

As Jesus continued his ministry, a crowd followed him because they wanted to hear him teach, they wanted to be healed, and Jesus was driving out an unclean spirit. He stood at a level place and started teaching:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you, have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.²⁸

Interestingly, the first Beatitudes Jesus mentioned in Luke was blessed are the *poor*. He cares so much about the poor and wants people to know how valuable the poor are to him. “Jewish tradition regards the poor, hungry, unclean, etc., not as cursed or impure but as deserving recipients of divine and earthly care.”²⁹ Jesus wants us, his disciples, to care for the poor among us. Jesus is saying to all of us, take care of the vulnerable population and care for the marginalized so they can experience a beautiful life on earth. “The poor among other terms of low status and oppression, the hungry, the hated and the persecuted.”³⁰ The commentary, *Feasting on the Gospel: Luke* suggests that:

The Beatitudes and woes in Luke’s sermon provide a fitting introduction to the sermon that follows. Jesus, like a new Moses, blesses his disciples for the hardships they have endured on his behalf and promises them rewards in his kingdom. Similarly, he predicts punishments for the rich and complacent. The trope of the two houses at the end of the sermon reinforces the blessings that come from heeding Jesus’ teachings and the woes that come from hearing the teachings but

²⁸ Luke 6:20-6. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 125.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 126.

³⁰ Westfall and Dyer, *The Bible and Social Justice*, 113.

disregarding them. Thus readers, ancient and modern, critical of wealth and privilege have found in Luke's Beatitudes and woes sources of inspiration.³¹

Jesus allows us to understand that we will be rewarded in his kingdom. However, there is hope because he is challenging the hearers not to be complacent in dealing with the poor. He is letting them know that he cares deeply for the poor, and their rewards will come one way or the other. On the other hand, he warns the rich and wealthy to help the poor in whatever capacity they can and always advocate for their needs.

Howard Marshall posits that:

The first group is those who by all outward appearance is to be pitied, but in the eyes of Jesus, they are blessed or happy because of what is promised to them. The description of them as being persecuted for the sake of the Son of man shows that the thought is not simply of those who are literally poor and needy, nor of all such poor people, but of those who are disciples of Jesus and hence occupy a pitiable position in the eyes of the world. Their present need will be met by God's provision in the future.³²

Marshall argues not just a physical poor but the disciple who occupies a pitiful position on earth. Jesus is promising them their reward in heaven. Green also posits that:

The poor refers not only to those of low economic status but to them as representatives of those marginalized in the larger culture. Similarly, the rich designates not only an economic class but is related fundamentally to issues of power and privilege, social location as an insider, and arrogant self-security apart from God. These notions that certain people are "inside" while others are "outside" are the societal norms that Jesus wished to overturn in his proclamation of the kingdom of God.³³

³¹ Jarvis and Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels--Luke, Volume 1*, 369.

³² I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 245-246.

³³ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 103-4.

Therefore, we can conclude that the poor are not simply the financially impacted. However, the marginalized could be viewed in terms of unfair labor practices, economic inequity, health inequity, racial discrimination, and discrimination due to gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age. Hence, Jesus's disciples should be passionate about justice and equality. Christians should be eager to fight for justice so that we all can live healthily and fulfilling lives. Luke's Jesus does not accuse the rich groups "directly of bringing great injustice, but the parallels connecting the woes to Jesus' beatitudes indict them for failing to respond properly to injustice. Instead, Jesus warns them that the comfort they enjoy in this age at the expense of those in need will be reversed in the age to come."³⁴ The effect of "the beatitudes is thus both to comfort men who suffer and to invite men to become disciples and find that their needs can be met by God."³⁵ However, the second group, according to Howard Marshall:

consists of those who are materially well off and enjoy the world's favor. Jesus' expression of sorrow for their condition is not directed against prosperity in itself but against those who enjoy such prosperity, are satisfied with it, and do not look beyond the satisfaction of their own desires. In general, however, the followers of Jesus, like the godly people described in the Psalms and wisdom literature, are literally poor and down-trodden, whereas many of those who reject the gospel enjoy material plenty. Riches can keep men out of the kingdom of God, and disciples must be prepared for poverty by worldly standards.³⁶

Luke's Jesus is not against people who are rich and wealthy. He is against how the wealthy people operate with their wealth knowing people are treated unfairly, but the rich are complacent and neglect the marginalized. He has a problem with rich people remaining silent on injustice and using their wealth only for power purposes. Jesus wants

³⁴ Westfall and Dyer, *The Bible and Social Justice*, 115.

³⁵ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 247.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 248.

us to be concerned about social justice issues in the Gospel of Luke, particularly in this chapter.

On our quest to discuss the gospel of Luke and Social Justice, we have arrived at our third example, which has to do with John the Baptist, who after hearing news about this messiah, healing the sick, raising the dead, curing diseases in each city he entered, and performing spectacular miracles, sent his disciple to Jesus in this chapter. At the same time, he was locked away in prison. The scripture reads,

The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So, John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another? When the men had come to him, they said, John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another? Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits and had given sight to many who were blind. And he answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receives their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.³⁷

Jesus loved John the Baptist and heard many things about him. However, Jesus's mission in this particular story is to take care of the marginalized before anything else. He wants us to understand that the needs of people are extremely important as we contemplate following him. John's disciples asked him a question, but Jesus started to heal and liberate the marginalized focusing on their issues. They wanted Jesus to be someone else and expected him to be a strong king, but he was just a humble human living amongst the lower-class citizens. Joseph Fitzmyer argues that "Jesus is saying here is that John and others must deal with the fact that he has not come in the way they might have expected."³⁸

³⁷ Luke 7:18-23, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*.

³⁸ Jarvis and Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels--Luke, Volume 1*, 468.

The blind will have restoration of vision, the crippled will leap up and walk, the deaf will hear the beautiful music playing, and the poor will have an abundance of richness in things that matters most as they will have good news proclaimed to them. Jesus is on a mission to show the entire community what he has come to do. He wanted John's disciples to see the assignment he had come to fulfill. This is to challenge disciples of Christ to preach, teach and engage in social justice issues. In the book *Bible and Social Justice*, Westfall and Dyer posit that:

Jesus inclusion of good news being proclaimed to the poor seems out of place within this list of miracles and healings. While it may seem anticlimactic to place proclamation to the poor as the culmination of the dramatic and miraculous, its placement actually stresses the importance of this feature in Jesus' ministry.³⁹

Longenecker suggests that "Jesus reply depicts a world in which healing blindness, curing diseases, restoring hearing and raising the dead were as exceptional as encouraging the poor."⁴⁰ The ministry of Jesus involves social justice issues. Jesus showed us how important it is throughout the Gospel of Luke. He wants us to acknowledge where they are hurting and help the marginalized every chance we get.

The above referenced verses demonstrate how important social justice issues were to Jesus. In order to educate my congregation in this biblical basis for social justice in the Christian religious tradition, I will lead a three-week sermon series on these selected passages from the Gospel of Luke, which substantiate that Jesus' ministry included social justice. Jesus wants us to know that his mission is to save mankind while bringing in a world that each of us will be equal. Jesus walked among the poorer class to see how

³⁹ Westfall and Dyer, *The Bible and Social Justice*, 112.

⁴⁰ Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 120.

people would react to the people whom they deem unworthy, but Jesus showed the leaders that the marginalized will hear good news.

Models of Social Justice Preaching

Preaching is complex, and preachers are often called to preach on various issues. However, the Adventist church rarely addresses social issues; on the other hand, we are quick to preach on prophecy and follow a detailed timeline of predictions while neglecting the community's problems. A social problem is public. Therefore,

People are aware of it or should be aware of it. The issue affects the community as a community; that is, it creates social consequences. It affects the well-being of society. Many social issues are systematic. A social issue can be international, national, statewide, regional, citywide, or congregational in size and scope.⁴¹

These issues are essential in preaching and should be addressed in the Adventist pulpit with proper guidance to stay faithful to the scripture. We should develop relationships with the community and the world, like the Jesus we passionately preach about. In the book *Patterns of Preaching* Dr. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, theorizes that

A pastor's preaching schedule should often include sermons whose major task is to deal seriously with social matters. Such sermons would critically think about the history of the problem, about its various dimension-sociologically, psychologically, politically, economically, emotionally, its representation in the media and in the arts, how the congregation encounters the phenomenon.⁴²

Tisdale urges that social justice sermons should be etched in the pastor's schedule because of the importance of preaching on issues relating to the community's lived experiences. Preaching is multifaceted, and a preacher has to adapt and preach to the times he/she is living without doing injustice to the text. A preacher shouldn't be

⁴¹ Ronald J. Allen, *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998),199.

⁴² Ibid, 199.

preaching a message of health and wellness when the community they serve cannot afford to eat a meal on that particular day. How can a preacher call someone to eat healthily when they lack the resources to do so? A preacher has to challenge the status quo and speak the truth to power while demanding equal treatment for all people.

Dr. Hyveth Williams, professor of Homiletics at the Andrews Theological Seminary, states that

we must improve proclamation of the gospel so that it is consistently transformative, the Christian church must produce a new generation of great preachers who, having learned a firm foundation of preaching, then practice what they preach.⁴³

We must be willing to preach transformative sermons that will change people's hearts, minds, circumstances and, ultimately, their lives. In *Encountering God Through Expository Preaching*, Fullerton, Orrick, and Payne defined preaching as "an invitation to meet with God in the Word he has given, and this marvelous book warmly invites the preacher to prepare himself well. For this glorious task."⁴⁴ However, I believe preaching is more than that, and preaching is the art and science of communicating God's message of hope to humanity in culturally relevant terms to meet their present needs. Preaching has to do with meeting peoples' needs and speaking truth to power, and preaching that focuses on God's Word will challenge pastors to seek justice and advocate for the marginalized. Preaching is multifaceted, but we realize that God desires justice throughout the Bible. Even Jesus in the Gospel of Luke came to liberate the marginalized

⁴³ Hyveth Williams, *Nothing but the Best: A Guide to Preaching Powerful Sermons* (Pittsburg, CA: Authors Press, 2020), 24.

⁴⁴ Ryan Fullerton, Jim Orrick, and Brian Payne, *Encountering God through Expository Preaching: Connecting God's People to God's Presence through God's Word* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 8.

from all systems that oppressed them. Hence, as preachers and we should seek to model the preaching of Jesus, we should ensure the Gospel and social justice are married when preaching.

Prophetic Preaching

Marvin McMickle postulates that:

Prophetic preaching points out the false gods of comfort. Further, it points out a lack of concern and acquiescence in the face of evil that can so easily replace the true God of scripture who calls true believers to the active pursuit of justice and righteousness for every member of society. Prophetic preaching also never allows the community of faith to believe that participation in the rituals of religious life can ever be an adequate substitute for that form of ministry that is designed to uplift the 'least of these in our world.'⁴⁵

Many preachers from various backgrounds have written about prophetic preaching, and each preacher has their idea of what prophetic preaching should be. Francis Chan is of the view that "prophetic preaching is forth-telling."⁴⁶ This type of preaching focuses on equality and justice for every member of society. It is God-centered preaching loaded with justice. Walter Brueggemann states that "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and a perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."⁴⁷

Hyveth Williams, expounding on Brueggemann, states:

alternative consciousness as the dismantling of the dominant consciousness of oppression through the power for God, who is allowed to be who he will be, as Moses did with Pharaoh in Egypt. On the other hand, royal consciousness consists of the entrenched political, economic, social, or religious powers that are largely uninterested in the freedom of God. Royal consciousness occurs when a king or government sets up temples or places to confine God, although he may be made accessible to or scheduled to meet those who seek him. Solomon was able to counter

⁴⁵ Marvin A. McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone: Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2019), 2.

⁴⁶ Francis Chan, *Prophetic Preaching* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 42.

⁴⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

the counterculture of Moses completely when he countered: the economics of equality with the economics of affluence, the politics of justice with the politics of oppression, and the religion of God's freedom with the religion of God's accessibility.⁴⁸

Prophetic preaching depends on God to allow you to speak truth to power. This type of preaching challenges the status quo and speaks liberation to the oppressed. Throughout scripture, God has used the prophets to give voice to the oppressed. Dale Andrews writes that

Prophetic preaching not only insists upon human care but also maintains the correlation between human reflexivity and theological relationality, which characterizes prophetic consciousness. Prophetic ministry unites worship and praxis, salvation and social justice.⁴⁹

Hays is quick to point out that among the many social issues addressed by the prophets of the Old Testament, the central theme they highlighted "is the abuse, oppression, or even the neglect of the underclass, whom the prophets identify as the widow, the orphan, and the alien or foreigner."⁵⁰

Hence, it is safe to conclude that the prophets advocated for the marginalized and preached a social justice-oriented message. Prophetic preaching challenges preachers to study the Bible more in-depth. "The Bible in one hand and current affairs newspapers in the other."⁵¹ It forces preachers to be deliberate about knowing the community to identify the disparities in the communities.

⁴⁸ Williams, *Nothing but the Best*, 47.

⁴⁹ Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 130.

⁵⁰Terry G. Carter, J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *Preaching God's Word, Second Edition: A Hands-On Approach to Preparing, Developing, and Delivering the Sermon* (Nashville: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 258.

⁵¹ Charles R. Peterson, *With Bible in One Hand and Newspaper in the Other: The Bible in the Public Square* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 1.

In his book *Exodus Preaching*, Kenyatta Gilbert explains prophetic preaching as

the interpretation that brings clarity to the sacred (the realities of God, revealed truth, highest moral values, and so on) and articulates what should be an appropriate human response to the sacred.⁵²

Preaching prophetically should bring clarity to the biblical text, considering the text and allowing the reader to speak for human needs. He then argues,

the preacher who preaches prophetically does not treat social justice or other sacred values as something independent from God but as being rooted in and emanating from God. Prophetic preaching does not take place in a vacuum, nor is it self-generating discourse; rather, it is daring speech that offers a vision of divine intent.⁵³

This type of preaching will allow listeners to be eager to hear that God's Justice is for human needs. This type of preaching gives hope to the oppressed and challenges the oppressors. Prophetic preaching helps the marginalized visualize a future beyond neglect, oppression, and abandonment, hoping to have glorious opportunities.

In the book *Preaching in the era of Trump*, Wes Allen argues that

the church and the state are married, but the relationship is no longer one in which the church is the major influence on society or even where the two patterns are equals. The church seems to have promised not only to love but also to obey its mate, and the result is unconscious but powerful civil religion.⁵⁴

The church is afraid to critique the state and conformed to obey the voice of the state rather than challenging the state to seek justice. Pastors preach about heaven and forget to live a life here on earth in defense of the oppressed. Prophetic preaching is fundamental in challenging government and systems to be fair and just. This type of social justice

⁵² Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons about Justice and Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), Introduction.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ O. Wesley Allen, *Preaching in the Era of Trump* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2017), 49.

preaching is essential for us to demand fairness in a world that can be unfair. In *A Pursued Justice, Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights*; Gilbert

posits that:

with an intrusive mode of homiletic speech, the great migration cleric made decisive inroads into their social landscape both within and beyond the church. In contrast to sermons that preached patience and humility with Whites and mirrored the hermeneutical concerns of White evangelicals, which emphasized individual sin and redemption while disregarding the social evil caused by economic and political structures of American society, they're specific more of prophetic preaching offered a radical critique of the status quo. Using the rhetoric of divine justice empowered listeners in their congregation to maintain their dignity and humanity during that tumultuous time. Their prophetic preaching sermons addressed issues ranging from unemployment to classism within their churches. Tapping into the biblical prophet's spiritual reservoir, a few black urban clergies of interwar America understood their preaching to be as much a courageous and challenging word as a gracious word. To their prophetic discourse are no less sacred than the prophet's because it aims was to encourage listeners to struggle with the meaning of faith, which meant exploring the revelation of God in scripture at its intersection with human experience.⁵⁵

Prophetic preaching should constantly challenge the status quo, and God's authority in the preacher's life should lead him/her to preach with power. The older preachers preached prophetically without the fear of what would happen or tried to be politically correct in using passive rhetoric to try and gain favors with the Whites. They focus on justice and allow the hearers to see the God of Justice in scripture while going through their human experiences. Gilbert proclaims that "Prophetic preaching lands on the ear of the despairing and is dedicated to helping them interpret their situation in light of God's justice and the quest for human freedom."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (Baylor, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 54-55.

⁵⁶ Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching*, 1.

During an interview with *Ministry Magazine*, an international journal for pastors, Dr. Hyveth Williams was asked about prophetic preaching; she responded that

Prophetic preaching is a biblically-based form of proclamation in which the preacher exercises the divine authority to be a spokesperson for God invested in them. When I speak of *authority*, I mean that which Jesus had. It caused "the crowds to be amazed at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). While power is a natural derivative of authority, exercising it out of self-will is always dangerous and oppressive. But when the power comes from the divine gift of authority, it becomes liberating and redemptive.⁵⁷

Prophetic preachers should ensure that they are biblically based and have the authority of God in their life and are not just preaching on their own accord. That is, the prophetic preacher should allow the Bible to speak about situations without bringing biases to the text, avoid false interpretation of the text in ways that have nothing to do with current reality. Preaching should be liberating and not condemning. While doing prophetic preaching, the preacher needs more than his/her power but the power of God to rest upon. "Prophetic preaching is counter-cultural and challenges the status quo."⁵⁸ To this end, Hyveth Williams argues that

all biblical preachers are to exercise this authority, but prophetic preaching speaks up for God's Justice in a way that is different and relevant to the needs or plight of hearers. Prophetic preaching critically challenges the status quo. Prophetic preachers are not preoccupied with being politically correct.⁵⁹

Tisdale also asserts that "Prophetic preaching is concerned with the evils and shortcomings of the present social order and is often more focused on corporate and

⁵⁷ "Prophetic Preaching: An Interview with Hyveth Williams," accessed November 16, 2021, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2011/07/prophetic-preaching>.

⁵⁸ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 10.

⁵⁹Ibid.

public issues than on individual and personal concerns."⁶⁰ Hence, the preacher should ensure in his/her preaching personal concerns have not been dealt with on the pulpit treating them as social justice issues. These are issues that are doing injustice to a group of people; Allen asserts that "A social justice issue is public. People are aware of it or should be aware of it. The issue affects the community as a community; it creates social consequences. It affects the well-being of the society."⁶¹ The preacher has to be intentional in calling out social injustice when he/she preaches. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead the preacher to stay biblical and see what disrupts the entire community that is not Godly. Prophetic preaching (Exodus preaching) according to Dr. Kenyatta Gilbert

lands on the ear of the despairing and is dedicated to helping them interpret their situation in light of God's justice and the quest for human freedom. As long as people desire to be free, Martin King's insightful query will never ring hollow.⁶²

Prophetic preaching should transform lives and should be preached by every pastor in a community where that injustices are prevalent; Sexism, racism, classicism, militarism, police brutality, I would assert in allowing someone to understand my meaning of prophetic preaching. Preachers should ensure we use the Bible and be constantly praying while standing in the pulpit, preaching prophetically, and challenging the status quo. A preacher should continuously pursue justice. Prophetic preaching is justice-oriented and should never focus on self-glory; it is standing with the authority and power of God preaching with boldness for the marginalized in one's community and around the world. As the late congressman John Lewis said, "Good Trouble," Prophetic preaching should get you into good trouble. Prophetic preaching will challenge the

⁶⁰ Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching*, 10.

⁶¹ Allen, *Patterns of Preaching*, 199.

⁶² Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching*, 1.

current order and aim for justice for all humankind. The "prophetic preacher needs to carefully examine the present cultural, social, or religious situation and then put that situation into a theological and biblical perspective."⁶³

Liberationist Preaching

Liberationist preaching as defined by James Harris, is transformational. This means that it is intended to affect change in the nature and structure of persons and society. Moreover, transformation means that the condition of one's mental and physical existence has been altered."⁶⁴ When preaching liberation theology, a preacher has to challenge the norm and preach sermons to transform the lives of the individuals who are listening. Harris hypothesizes that:

Liberation is a precondition of transformation. This means that before one can actually change one's life situation one needs to be free to do so. The process of transformation begins with a new understanding of consciousness which requires a mental and spiritual transformation.⁶⁵

Ronald Allen asserts that "God intends to liberate the world from oppression. Oppression is a form of sin in which a person or community exploits other people or communities. Oppression is frequently systemic, that it results from patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that are transpersonal."⁶⁶ For example, in the case of slavery, some of the people in power wielded their authority over black bodies without knowing they were being oppressive. Their worldview, which held that black people were intellectually inferior, chattel rather than human beings, enabled them to treat black bodies in barbaric ways. Hence, the liberation preacher has to bring awareness to the historical wrongs of

⁶³ "Prophetic Preaching."

⁶⁴ James H. Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 57.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 58.

⁶⁶ Allen, *Patterns of Preaching*, 223.

their given context, such as my context in the American south, and preach a message about the liberating power of God. Harris argues that the liberating” power of God is for everyone. The oppressors are also oppressed and need to be liberated from the will to dominate others.”⁶⁷ The God that liberates will speak to the oppressors' hearts and recognize that we are all created equal. The liberation preacher has to balance his preaching without guiltting the oppressors to believe God only cares for the oppressed, and they will be doomed even after an encounter with God. Carolyn Ann Knight, in the book *Patterns of Preaching*, suggests that

Liberation preachers believe the God operates through the processes of history to free humankind and nature from oppression. God aims for all people and all elements of the natural world to have their own integrity, secure living conditions, freedom, opportunities to relate with all created entities in love and justice. The best liberation preachers are aware that oppressors are oppressed by their oppressive ideas, feelings, and actions. The liberation preacher alerts oppressed and oppressor to God’s present activity in using individuals and groups to move toward a world in which all live together in love, justice, dignity, and shared material resources.⁶⁸

Liberation preaching challenges the status quo to provide a better quality of life not just for a few people but for everyone. Liberation preaching calls out the inequality we see throughout our community, such as health disparities, economic disparities, and even food insecurity. Liberation preaching gives hope to the oppressed, while at the same time challenging the oppressors to change. Liberation is a “precondition of transformation.” This means that before one can change one’s life situation, one needs to be free to do so. The transformation process begins with a new understanding of consciousness which requires a mental and spiritual transformation.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Harris, *Preaching Liberation*, 25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 224.

⁶⁹ Harris, *Preaching Liberation*, 58.

Jesus Christ is the liberator and transformer throughout the Gospel of Luke. Jesus walked liberating the oppressed and came with the mission to set captives free. His mission was liberating, and he would be considered a liberation preacher. He was bold and spoke truth to power while challenging the powerful people in his time to act fairly and justly. We can do liberation preaching by mirroring upon the dimensions of Jesus Christ as the liberator. “Black theology described Jesus as the liberator, taking its cue from the words attributed to Jesus”⁷⁰ in Luke’s gospel: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”⁷¹ In this text, Jesus is seen as the ground of liberation. James Cone says, “Jesus Christ, therefore, in his humanity and divinity is the point of departure for ... the meaning of liberation.”⁷² Bishop Joseph A. Johnson Jr. in his book *The Soul of the Black Preacher*, explains

Jesus is the liberator. He is the revelation of the wisdom, the power, and the love of God. This was the message which the early Christian preachers were commissioned to proclaim. This message was called the kerygma. We preach Christ, Paul shouts. At the heart of the kerygma lies this fundamental Christological affirmation: Jesus is the Liberator!⁷³

Jesus Christ is the great liberator, and preachers should be liberationist preachers in line with his great example. The liberation sermon “... identifies oppression in specific settings. The sermon tries to name the individuals, communities, and social movements

⁷⁰ Ibid, 136.

⁷¹ Luke 4:14, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*.

⁷² James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1980-1992* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 90.

⁷³ Joseph Andrew Johnson, *The Soul of the Black Preacher* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1971), 86.

through whom God is seeking to make the world a community of love and justice.”⁷⁴

Warren Stewart, a pastor, and the author, suggests:

This liberating quality of God does imply that every person or group that professes to believe in the God of the Christian faith must recognize the need for liberation whether on a personal, social, or communal level. This can only be done through the process of continuous self-examination and interaction with members of the oppressed as well as the oppressors. God must be approached as a liberator by us who are bound by our cultural differences, acquired prejudices, handed-down traditions, and propensity toward homogeneity. Each of us who is assigned to interpret the Word of God. Must first be liberated by the God of liberation.⁷⁵

Each person has to experience the liberating power of Jesus Christ for themselves.

Liberation will allow people to fight for justice for the oppressed. Liberation can be personal, societal, or communal; we should be passionate about injustices. Liberation is not just for the oppressed and God torments the oppressors. The oppressors can be liberated by the preacher's message and allow that transformation in the believers' hearts.

Benjamin E. Mays’ in the book *The Negro’s God*, quotes from a sermon titled “God Liberates Human Personality,” in which the preacher proclaims that God has the power to transform individuals and the social order. The⁷⁶ following words indicate that God is a revolutionary change agent who can effect change in the systemic ills of society”. Mays states:

Many are the human souls in this world with the capacity for the expression of the abundant life, if only the stone of remorse could be rolled away from the doorway of their hearts. Others there are whose lives would be gems of abiding influence if the stone of conceit could be rolled away. Whole communities could be electrified, changed, transformed if stones of shallowness, indifference, indolence, could be rolled back, so that the entombed life might come forth with glorified power and

⁷⁴ Allen, *Patterns of Preaching*, 225.

⁷⁵ Harris, *Preaching Liberation*, 25.

⁷⁶ Harris, 26.

revolutionize the social order. This rolling back of human repressions is absolutely essential to the peace and happiness of the world.⁷⁷

Benjamin Mays was intentional in preaching this sermon. People of color have something beautiful inside them that has been suffocated by oppression in some form. Mays wanted the oppressors to be conscious that their hearts need to be transformed and understand that we all need to experience abundant life. Liberation preaching confronts oppression and provide biblical steps to live and experience a whole life. Liberation preaching gives hope of something better, if we work together and fight for justice for all humankind. To my mind, liberation preaching is inclusive of and constitute with social justice. The two can work hand in hand to educate their communities and flight for systemic changes.

⁷⁷ Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 60.

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT ASSESSMENT

Research Design & Methodology

In order to model a liberative and social justice-oriented style of preaching, I conducted a three-week sermon series at the Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist church. A total of six sermons were preached for our Saturday and Wednesday services. As the Pastor, I recruited those who would like to participate in a voluntary questionnaire about social justice preaching. I made it clear that this was not mandatory, and that they were free to decline. With that said, the questionnaires provided me with a focus group of fifteen individuals.

The first thing that I did was present the informed consent form and reiterate that those who would be taking part would have to at least eighteen. Participants then signed an Informed Consent Form, which included the theme of the research, and the details of their participation. They were made aware of the privacy and maintained utmost confidentiality throughout this data.¹ Although the congregation was not a part of the focus group, I encouraged them to maintain consistent attendance and was made aware that their reflections on the sermons were a part of this research project. Ultimately, this project engaged quantitative and qualitative research methods, which included yes/no answers and left a space for participants share their experience in dealing with discriminatory issues. The quantitative research design was chosen because it searches for “general laws and empirical regularities,” meanwhile, a qualitative research design was chosen because, as John Creswell states, it “is a means for exploring and

¹ See Appendix A.

understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”²

Lastly, I held a focus group at the conclusion of the sermon series, which allowed the participants to debrief about their experience of the series.

Pre-Sermon Questionnaire³

Each member that signed the Informed Consent Form received a Pre-Sermon questionnaire about Social Justice preaching in the local Seventh-day Adventist church.⁴ I surveyed each member individually to learn about their views on Social Justice preaching in the Seventh-day Adventist church prior to them hearing any preaching regarding social justice. The pre-sermon questionnaire was developed to formulate a baseline of thought for each individual. I gave each participant a series of four questions; three were yes/no, and the final question was a fill in the blank, asking if they ever experienced racism or witnessed it. After I gave the questions, the participants were told of a debrief group to learn more about social justice and the community after the sermon series. The participants were excited about the debrief segment. They were eager to share the injustices they had experienced and how the church could be more involved in social justice preaching. However, a few were worried that we should not be involved in social justice matters, but focus our attention on the Gospel instead.

² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing, 2014), 4.

³ See Appendix B

⁴ See, Appendix B

Pre-Sermon Series Questionnaire/ Survey

The pre-sermon survey revealed mixed thoughts among survey participants regarding the four questions asked. The group was composed of four men and eleven women; all fifteen participants were born and raised in America. Regarding ethnicity, thirteen of the participants were American-born, and two were born in the Caribbean. When asked if the church should be involved in social problems, of the four men surveyed, three said yes, and one said the church should not be affected. Of the eleven women surveyed, nine said yes, and two said no. The majority of the group believes that the church should be involved in social problems. However, three think the church should refrain from being involved in social issues and just preach the Gospel.

The second question asked whether the church should preach social justice sermons; three men said yes, and one said no. He added that the church should be focused on Jesus and leave politics for the politician because it has no place in God's church. As for the female participants, nine said the church should be preaching social justice sermons while two simply said no, the church should not be preaching social-justice-oriented sermons. The participants had mixed feelings about preaching social justice sermons from the pulpit. The majority believe it should be preached, but a few still think that the pulpit is sanctified and social justice sermons should not be preached at church.

The third question asked if participants believe that systematic Racism exists in America. Interestingly, all fifteen participants believe that systematic Racism exists in America. Each participant was very transparent about this, because all of them have experienced Racism or witnessed it. It is fascinating to note that one participant said that he had experienced "racism most of his life during his job." He says that many employers

would promote someone of a lighter complexion even if that person doesn't have the qualification or experience. He shared an incident where he worked for a company for ten, and that he held a master's degree. A young white male who had recently finished college with a bachelor's degree; got the job that required a master's degree. He shared how he was overlooked because of the color of his skin and ended up leaving the company because of nepotism and systemic racism. Systemic racism exists "because of critical decisions made by important European American decision-makers at key points in North American history. For centuries, the European American elite has actively shaped major social, economic, and political institutions to support and maintain its oppression of Americans of color."⁵

One participant answering question four shared that she had experienced racism all throughout high school. She went on to say she was "constantly bullied by some white classmates, and the teacher ignored it, but when her friend acted like the bully, the teacher wanted to suspend all her friends because the white girl started crying." Another participant says that he has personally witnessed police harassing black boys in his neighborhood because of the color of their skin. He noted a time when the group of boys was walking home from college and the police separated them into pairs, black and white, and treated the black boys harshly while not even searching the white boys. The police then responded that they fit the description of a group of boys that kidnapped some white boys.

⁵ Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 16.

One participant said that the Murfreesboro police department tends to racially profile the black and brown men in the community. He states, “A Black man might be driving a nice car, and police will find illegal reasons to stop and search his vehicle for drugs,” it seems the Police think a black man in the neighborhood cannot afford to drive a specific vehicle. They abuse their power using illegal searches for black and brown bodies. The pre-survey questions revealed injustices that African American faces daily. They were very open and eager to talk about the injustices they had to endure because of their location or the color of their skin.

“Black people get killed every day while the whites live” were the words of one of the participants doing the questionnaire. One boldly writes that she got rejected for a job that she was qualified to perform, and wages and pay increases stagnated because of her skin color and gender. A college professor said she has witnessed racism in the school system where she works. The questionnaire exposed that systemic racism exists and even happens to Adventist Christians who worship God every Sabbath.

Post- Sermon Questionnaire

The post-sermon questionnaire results were fascinating, in that the same questions were asked, but some responses were changed. I can safely say after the “Liberating the Marginalized: A Journey through the Gospel of Luke Series” some participants had a change of heart with regard to preaching social justice sermons. After hearing the sermon series, of the fifteen participants, only one continued to believe that the church should not be involved in social justice issues.⁶ That is a significant improvement from the pre-

⁶ See Appendix C.

sermon questionnaire, where three participants expressed their concerns that the church should not be involved in social justice issues.

The questionnaire also asked if participants thought the church should be preaching social justice issues, and fourteen out the fifteen indicated that they believe the church should be preaching on social justice issues. That is an improvement from the pre-sermonic questionnaire. The third question asked if participants believe systematic racism exists in America, and all participants believe that it does exist. In the book *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram Kendi postulates that racism is a “marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produce and normalizes racial inequities. Racial inequity is when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing. A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups.”⁷ Other terms often describe racist policies as systematic, institutional or structural racism. The participants were made aware of this book and produced their own definition in the focus group after the post questionnaire.

One participant expressed a subtle form of racism that occurred at work when she decided to wear her hair in a natural style. She described how her supervisor said that her hair was unkempt and should be straightened. In contrast, she told her that wearing braids or hair extensions is viewed as unprofessional for this work environment because she could not understand the curls in a black woman's hair. She was told in a crowded room that it seems you are having a terrible hair day today. Another participant conveyed that racism and racial stereotypes are perpetuated in the media, which portrays African

⁷ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York City: Random House Publishing Group, 2019), 42-3.

Americans as angry, violent, and inferior to whites. A young lady suggested that watching television can make you think that whites are superior and blacks are inferior. She says that throughout media, the ‘stars’ or lead roles are white men or women while they overlook black actors. She says that black actors would be cast in leading roles in the nastiest and most demoralizing movies that devalue our culture and people.

Interestingly, this survey revealed that all fifteen participants have either witnessed or experienced racism at some point in their lives. African Americans have struggled with feeling less than the white man for over four hundred years. Many of them have heard stories from their parents or Grandparents about the injustice of slavery. They have been living on the margins for many years and feel stifled through the racism they have experienced or personally witnessed.

Focus Group, Circle, or Debrief

After the final sermon, the fifteen participants and I met to think about our next steps and debrief on what transpired through the preached word. All fifteen participants believe that we need to do more to be active in social justice issues as a church. While the one person believes that the church should not be preaching on the issues, that person believes that the church should help the community where there is a need. She quoted Ellen G. White that “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with people as one who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He invited them, Follow Me.”⁸ She was making her case that we need to minister to the community's needs.

⁸ Ellen Gould Harmon White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1905), 73.

However, another participant says that social justice issues were a priority for Ellen and the church because her quotation continued with the needs of the people. Ellen White asserts

We need to come close to the people by personal effort. If we would give less time to sermonizing and more time to personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will cannot, be without fruit.⁹

Ellen White wanted us to comfort the people and understand when they hurt. As a church, we are to be more in the community and less in the physical building. We are meant to be caring for the sick, the poor, and the marginalized among us. They were excited to begin to work in helping alleviate some of the injustices in our community, which aligns with the liberative model of Jesus and the prophetic message of Ellen G. White.

The first initiative we spoke about as a church is to help feed the poor in our community. The personal ministries leaders were intentional in getting the food pantry restarted and to advertise its reopening to the community. We created a budget to spend on the community service department to help feed the poor in our community. Secondly, we organized an information session with the Chief of Police to discuss the problem of racial profiling, thus allowing the community to participate and ask the Police the hard questions they would not be able to ask during a public encounter with the police. The participants were open to communicating and sharing perspectives so that the police

⁹ Ibid, 74.

could understand how they were being treated. The police also had the opportunity to speak about the crime and violence situation plaguing the community and opportunities to provide solutions that will lead to fewer African Americans being confronted by law enforcement.

The church mobilized to do a community initiative of having a community guest day with activities for the children. The children have a bounce house, pizza, golf cart, and many fun activities to enjoy their time at the church. After hearing sermons on social justice issues, the Seventh-day Adventist church wanted to be more involved in the community. They did not want to sit idle anymore, but rather to reach out to people, like Jesus. The debrief session allowed people to share their views openly and gave suggestions on community impact projects to limit the gap of injustice. One participant shared the church should invite a few government officials and voice our concerns as citizens in this community. We left that session with an understanding for the church to make an impact and tackle social injustices, that is, participate in marches, demand equal pay, speak out on injustices and always be there for the marginalized by providing a safe space, the church, for them to feel at home.

Project Evaluation and Assessment

The questionnaires, (pre and post), and three-week sermon series yielded exciting results worthy of consideration. The research analysis was fascinating, and I was surprised people were so open to my questions and preaching. My inquiry also garnered a few suggestions on addressing the issues of social justice. The series entitled “Liberating the Marginalized: A Journey Through the Gospel of Luke” was conducted at the Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist church in North Carolina. The dates for the series

was February 5-19, 2022; preparation went into this series in handing out flyers, and promotions on the church's Facebook page, YouTube page, and website. The series was also promoted in the community as we handed out flyers inviting members of our community to attend these three weeks of Social Justice preaching from the church.

The series was held on Saturdays and Wednesdays, and the participants that signed the informed consent forms were aware that they had to attend all three weeks of the series. A follow-up with a post-questionnaire and a strategizing session to figure out our next steps as a church on implementing what we have learned throughout the series would be next. The community members were very excited to be given an invitation, and the church walked door to door each Sabbath handing out flyers and doing a demographic study. At the start of the series, we saw an increasing amount of attendance in the church because the young people in the community were very interested in social justice topics. They wanted to know more about the Bible and Social Justice and what the church can do to help the community.

Each Sabbath leading up to the series from January, we would walk the community and hand out flyers inviting the community members to this inspirational journey through the gospel of Luke. I was amazed to see how many people were interested in social justice and that they kept asking questions. I would get commendations from young and old on how relevant the church is being and finally, they can voice their opinions on the injustices they have experienced. The community members are of the opinion that there is a disconnect between the church and the community. Oftentimes, the church members separate themselves from the community, and when they visit church they felt as though the church was not relevant to what they

were going through, but spoke on things that are just focused on the past and the pillars of the church without, understanding their daily struggles. The sermon series made them feel heard and finally understood by the church. The series focused on the marginalized and pulled from the Bible to show that God loves the marginalized and understands their experiences.

The three weeks of preaching was very intense and participation from the wider community kept growing each time the series would be held. They were motivated in attending a series like this. People were amazed that we would do something like this because they have never experienced a pastor preaching on their issues and not focusing on the doctrines of the church was a major alarm that was shared. The series was something that people wanted to hear for a long time. I must admit that my perception was wrong when I believed I would get major apprehension from the old Adventists in the church, it was mind-blowing to realize the older Adventists were greatly appreciative of a series like this.

For a reader interested in developing a project similar to this, I would recommend holding three consecutive weeks or sermons. I would also recommend holding a debrief session after each sermon, in order to give attendees an opportunity to share what they have experienced. I would also recommend trying to get people from other demographics, sexual orientations, and ethnic groups in order to see the effectiveness of social justice preaching for a variety of marginalized populations. I would also suggest that anyone interested in this project formulate a series of texts from Luke for pastors interested in preaching social justice sermons. Commentaries are helpful resources for pastors who are interested in social justice preaching. I would also suggest that pastors

plan the series in advance so that more groundwork can be done to invite community members to be a part of the project. A recommendation I would suggest as well is asking community members the same questions we asked members about social justice preaching to see if there's a disconnect between answers.

In my opinion, this project was needed in my church and the wider community; and it helped people to start thinking and learning about how to do social justice preaching. The congregation was amazed by our discussions after and the timely messages that was biblical about the injustices they are encountering in everyday life. *Liberating the Marginalized: A Journey through the Gospel of Luke* is a project that will be fondly remembered throughout the Murfreesboro community and church.

CONCLUSION

The Seventh-day Adventist church is a unique and gifted church that believes in worshipping God on the Seventh-day (sabbath).¹ For many generations, the Seventh-day Adventist church failed to participate in social justice issues that affect African Americans in our communities. The church had to split for the blacks to feel heard, and now we have regional and state conferences: black and white conferences. Interestingly, the early pioneers of our tradition were vocal on social justice issues. Significantly, Ellen G. White, the Seventh-day Adventist church co-founder, was very passionate about equity and spoke on many occasions to abolish slavery, the most significant injustice in America's history. Ellen White believed in equal treatment for blacks and whites, which resulted from thinking we were created in the image of God. Ellen White did not only speak on the church's doctrines and the eschatological implications of preaching end-time messages. She also advocated for the fair treatment of African Americans and the release of enslaved people by white owners. She challenged the status quo of her time and spoke on matters causing injustices to the African Americans.

The early pioneers believed in the church's doctrines and preached them in conjunction with issues that affect their community. However, it reaches a point where it seems the church is rarely getting involved in political or social problems because we are focusing on the coming of Jesus Christ and allowing people to understand the doctrines that we teach by neglecting the suffering they are experiencing. Throughout this dissertation, we reached a pivotal point in the Seventh-day Adventist church's history where we feel the silence of the Adventists and hear the world's noise. The world is doing

¹ See Exodus 20.

the church's job, and the church is preparing its people for the coming of the Lord without acknowledging their struggles on earth. The idea that preaching social justice sermons would devalue biblical preaching is incorrect. On the contrary, preaching social justice sermons *is* biblical and speaks to the injustices the people are facing and how God is working on their behalf. It is possible to assimilate and accommodate biblical preaching with prophetic preaching.

“Liberating the Marginalized: A Journey through the Gospel of Luke” has garnered some interesting thoughts and ideas that the church should be aware of and be willing to try to be better able to speak to a younger generation of believers that wants to know what God can do to them right now. The church cannot just preach the church's doctrines and avoid social justice issues. The church needs to be involved in matters affecting its community for effective ministry. The church has been silent for too long and needs to have its voice back in calling out injustices.

Although the sermonic series was done at a predominantly black Adventist church, it shows the importance of preaching social justice sermons. All the participants that took part in the study have in some way, shape, or form experienced or witnessed racism. This research should be important to the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide. Even though it was done at a local church, it is relevant to all the Seventh-day Adventist churches, especially those in the United States, given its reluctance to acknowledge and heal from its original sin of slavery. On the other hand, the research shows how certain members still maintain the belief that the church should not be involved in social justice issues but focus on returning Jesus Christ and getting everyone ready. However, the majority believes that we should be involved and help the

community because Jesus in Luke cared for the community, which he was a part of, and that is why he healed the sick and raised the dead. Jesus was doing social justice work throughout the Gospel of Luke and even preached his first sermon challenging the church and leaders to be involved in social justice issues.

This research is fundamental to understanding the church dynamics and teaching the Seventh-day Adventist pastors to preach justice-oriented sermons that are thoroughly biblical to uphold faithfulness to the text. I recommend that more pastors learn how to preach social justice sermons to minister to their congregation. I would recommend more great advertisements of the programs for the community to be involved in the questionnaire to understand how they view the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Doing a series or project such as this will require much groundwork and cooperation from the congregation in which you belong. I would recommend a larger sample of participants to have an intergenerational scope of answers to activist preaching. I was blindsided by the acceptance of the elderly of social justice preaching because I thought they would believe that this type of preaching does not belong in the Seventh-day Adventist church. I grew up in a Caribbean context where the older generation focused mainly on the Bible and doctrines and no other issues. I thought they would call for more doctrines to be preached and less about injustices that Black and Brown people suffer, but I received overwhelming support from the older generation for this particular project. Leaving from a context of mostly Caribbean to African Americans from the North to the South, I believe played a role in the acceptance of this type of project as well. I was preparing to get more resistance when introducing this type of preaching in the Seventh-

day Adventist church which I love so dearly. However, I received only a few concerns and a majority of support for my project.

Preaching social justice sermons to a local Seventh-day Adventist congregation has been a learning experience. I am grateful for the opportunity to study and understand why Jesus in Luke was focused on the social issues of his time. Jesus in the Gospel of Luke cared about the marginalized, and I believe as a church, we should follow the blueprint of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. The church should be the house of justice where everyone is treated equally because we are all equal at the foot of the cross.

I would also recommend allowing the congregation to play a larger part in developing this project. For example, the congregation could develop a community-based program to help alleviate the injustices they have witnessed or experienced in the wider community, such as food insecurity. In my experience, the focus group was extremely important for after-effects of trauma and for people who want to talk about how they are feeling after doing a project like this that brought up some unresolved issues in their life. The focus group as well, can oversee projects for the community to help the marginalized. The preaching is important but what happens after the preaching ministry of the pastor, how can this project be a transformative project? That is, by reaching the community where they are and working to find solutions to the small problems that the church can handle. That is, influence the congregation to be on the city council, to vote, and to run for local office so that more African Americans can be a part of the decision-making process for the community.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a diverse church with millions of members worldwide. I would recommend to my readers to examine social justice preaching in a broader context. That is, consider the diversity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. How are people perceiving social justice preaching not just in the African American context but the whites of the church? I would like to continue this research by doing it in a multicultural church to see their perception of social justice preaching in the church and not just mainly African Americans.

Social justice preaching to other minorities that are not just African Americans or Black or Brown, that is, the LGBTQIA+ community and their views on social justice preaching would be another area, I would recommend to expand this project. How does the LGBTQIA+ community view social justice preaching and what would they want to see implemented in this type of preaching? Social justice preaching effectiveness in the community could be considered and see if it is relevant or not for the next steps in this project. I am interested in knowing how social justice preaching is perceived by overseas and the Caribbean, Caribbean Americans. These are great next steps for this type of preaching project. The Seventh-day Adventist church is a worldwide church with people from Africa, the Caribbean, and Black and Brown people all over the world. It would be interested to know if social justice preaching is relevant to them in their current context.

Finally, resources on how local pastors can incorporate social justice in their preaching each week. A local pastor has to be intentional about preaching social justice sermons and be close to the community to understand the issues they are facing. A local pastor is more than a pulpiteer but has to be ready to walk the community and mingle among the members and the parishioners to understand what they are dealing with on a

regular basis. A local pastor can be the moral compass of the community by understanding who they are and their life experiences. Resources can be provided for the local pastor on how to put together a social justice sermon and in the future, this project could become a book to teach pastors how to incorporate social justice into their sermons.

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APPENDICES

A

Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist Church “Social Justice Preaching in the local Seventh-day Adventist Church”

INFORMED CONSENT

December 15, 2021

You are being invited to participate in a research study about how Social Justice preaching is relevant or not relevant in the Seventh-day Adventist church here at Murfreesboro, North Carolina. This study will seek to find answers if the Luke Jesus was concerned about Social Justice issues throughout the Gospel. This study is being conducted by Pastor Demar Felix Fearon from the Doctor of Ministry program at Drew Theological Seminary (Drew University) as part of the final requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

We ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

There is a possibility of psychological risk if you decide to participate in this research study. The level of psychological risk is very minimal and is no greater than when thinking about issues of social justice or systemic racism in everyday life. The topic will be addressed in the questionnaire and we will explore it in the preaching experience. As part of your participation, you will be asked whether or not you have personally experienced systemic racism. There are no costs to you for participating in the study. The questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to complete. The questionnaire content will be asking about Social Justice Issues in the Seventh-day Adventist church. There will be a total of six (6) sermons, and services will be held on Saturdays and Wednesdays in the span of three (3) weeks. Hence, it will be two (2) sermons each week. The participant is required to attend all six (6) preaching experiences at the church beginning February 5-19th 2022. Wednesday's services will be at 7:00 pm and Saturday Services will begin at 11:00 am. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study should provide more general benefits.

This survey is anonymous. Please do not write your name on the survey. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Although the survey is anonymous, there might be a possibility that the researcher could identify the participants based upon their responses to the survey. If that were to occur, confidentiality will be maintained.

Individuals from Drew Theological Seminary and the Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. The record will only be preserved for three (3) years. Should the data be published, no individual information will be disclosed.

There is a minor psychological risk in taking part in this survey. However, psychological services contact information will be provided to mitigate the risk involved in participating in this survey.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. By completing the survey, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Pastor Demar Felix Fearon, 347-353-5166, 3513 Holman Way, Greenville, NC, 27834, 347-353-5166, dfearon@drew.edu

The Doctor of Ministry Committee has reviewed and approved this request to conduct this project. If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact Dr. Chris Medvecky, email at cmedvecky@drew.edu or Dr. Gary Simpson, 973-408-3992, via email at gsimpson@drew.edu or Dr. Meredith Hoxie-Schol, 973-408-3452 or via email at mhoxieschol@drew.edu.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Drew Institutional Review Board regarding my concerns.

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist Church

“Social Justice Preaching in the local Seventh-day Adventist Church”

Pre-Sermon Questionnaire

Please fill in the blanks or place an X or checkmark next to the word or phrase that best matches your response.

Gender:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Female

Origin/Raised:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Born and raised in the US
<input type="checkbox"/>	Born and raised outside the US
<input type="checkbox"/>	Born in the US and raised outside
<input type="checkbox"/>	Born outside the US and raised outside
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raised in US and outside the US

Race/Ethnicity:

<input type="checkbox"/>	American Born Black
<input type="checkbox"/>	Caribbean Born Black
<input type="checkbox"/>	How do you identify yourself?

1. Do you think the church should be involved in social problems? **Yes** **No**
2. Do you think we should be preaching social justice in our church? **Yes** **No**
3. Do you think systematic racism exists in America? **Yes** **No**
4. If yes, how have you personally experienced or witnessed it?

APPENDIX C

Murfreesboro Seventh-day Adventist Church

“Social Justice Preaching in the local Seventh-day Adventist Church”

Post-Sermon Questionnaire

Please fill in the blanks or place an X or checkmark next to the word or phrase that best matches your response.

Gender:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Female

Origin/Raised:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Born and raised in the US
<input type="checkbox"/>	Born and raised outside the US
<input type="checkbox"/>	Born in the US and raised outside
<input type="checkbox"/>	Born outside the US and raised outside
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raised in US and outside the US

Race/Ethnicity:

<input type="checkbox"/>	American Born Black
<input type="checkbox"/>	Caribbean Born Black
<input type="checkbox"/>	How do you identify yourself?

1. Do you think the church should be involved in social problems? **Yes** **No**
2. Do you think we should be preaching social justice in our church? **Yes** **No**
3. Do you think systematic racism exists in America? **Yes** **No**
4. If yes, how have you personally experienced or witnessed it?

Appendix D

Topic: Liberated from the Margins

Text: Luke 8:26-39

Luke 8:26-39

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasene's, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time, this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house but had lived in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Highest God? I beg you, don't torture me!" 29 For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times, it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he permitted them. 33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35 and the people went out to see what had happened.

When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37 Then, all the people of the region of the Gerasene's asked Jesus to leave them because they were overcome with fear. So, he got into the boat and left.

38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So, the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Claim: Jesus liberates us from the oppressive powers that keep us on the margins, but others would prefer for us to remain on the margins than challenge the status quo.

Focus: If you are on the margins of society, Jesus has come to liberate you from oppressive powers so you can challenge the status quo.

Function: To invite the audience to seek Jesus as our source of liberation.

Form:

1. Describe life on the margins of society

- a. Looks like demon-possessed men
- b.** How does the text describe this man
- c. demonic control made them a menace to their society
- d. When we think of demonic powers today, we may think of systems of power that keep black people marginalized
- e. Examples

2. Consider people's response to liberation for the margins

- a. We know that Jesus liberated the man from demon possession, but let us look at how the people reacted to the man being freed
- b. **34** Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town, and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. **35** Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.
- c. Why did the people distance themselves from Jesus, when he just liberated demon-possessed man? Man who are victims of oppressive power systems.
- d. They shouldn't be surprised that the demons asked to be sent into the pigs and they shouldn't be surprised that Jesus complied with the request because "to the Jews, unclean pigs were a natural abode for unclean spirits."
- e. What are the moral and economic implications of destroying a large herd of swine that does not belong to him in the first place?'

- f. One person noted that “They protest — as we often protest — because health can be more frightening than sickness, and liberation threatens the fragile truce required by every status quo.”
 - g. They prefer to see someone sick than healthy because when someone is sick. They have no power. They prefer for the man to be possessed and overpower. Because, if he is liberated he will challenge the status quo. As soon as he gets WOKE, they will fear him and criminalize his character.
 - h. They prefer to see someone subjected and marginalized than a liberated person.
 - i. They prefer to see someone enslaved and dependent than liberated because a liberated person challenges the status quo.
 - j. If you are liberated, you will challenge the status quo.
3. **Show how Jesus liberates us from the margin**
 4. **Provide the assurance that Jesus has come to liberate us from destructive powers**
 5. **Invite members to experience the liberating power of Jesus.**

Conclusion

I am done. Good day church... God Bless you real good. Before I go, I just want to give you the assurance that Jesus has come to liberate us from destructive powers. Can I talk about Jesus for a moment? A Brown skin Palestinian born. A Jewish immigrant conceived to a teenage mother.

And he was raised in the ghetto of Galilee. Can I still talk about Him? The Jesus who fought against the system of oppression. When Jesus looked, people didn't have access to healthcare; He healed them without charging a co-pay. When Jesus saw young men in the streets, he educated them even though they had limited resources. When Jesus visited a teenage mother struggling to carry on, He picked that mother up and sent her through college. Can I still talk about this Jesus? You'll still say nothing. Let me bring it a little closer. When Jesus saw this young black man from the hood and violence-prone territory of Old Harbour Bay, He said not because He is from the hood means he is up to no good.

He picked me up, turned me around, and planted my feet on solid ground. Y'all still not saying anything: Let me tell you about my friends when Jesus saw another young man from Central village. What good can come out of the central village? I am glad you asked. Because Jesus let him defy the odds, he went to NCU, then Yale, and now preaching about the liberating Power of Jesus. Can I still talk about this brown skin Palestinian-born Jewish immigrant, born to a teenage mother and raised in the ghetto of Galilee Jesus?

Another friend of mine was raised by his grandmother because his mother died at a tender age. The system thought he would fold up and die. But he defied the odds and was liberated from the margins. Top of his class at NCU, Valedictorian, and now received his Ph.D. I am done church. I am done.

Jimmy Cliff said it right:

Well, they tell me of a pie up in the sky

Waiting for me when I die

But between the day you're born and when you die

They never seem to hear even your cry

So as sure as the sun will shine

I'm gonna get my share now of what's mine

Because I have been liberated from the margins.

Thank you, Jesus!!!!

I have had some good days,

I have had some bad days

But when I think things over

Most of my good days

It outweighs my bad days

Topic: IS NOT THIS JOSEPH'S SON?

Text: Luke 4: 16-22

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; 17 and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." 20 And he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, "Is not this Joseph's Son?"

Claim: Where you are from doesn't determine your future with Christ in this life. God can use just about anybody from anywhere to fulfill his mission.

Focus: Jesus born in a lowly community was chosen by God to fulfill a special mission to liberate the marginalized.

Function: To invite and inspire members to be proud to serve Jesus because he is the one that came to fulfill all the prophecies and liberate us.

Form:

1. Describe people from communities that should have failed in life
 - A. The low expectations of people to be someone from Nazareth
 - B. The one whom God influenced by the Spirit came from a lowly background
2. If we allow the Spirit to lead, we can accomplish the mission of God
3. To God, you are more than where you came from
4. Jesus fulfilled the messianic mission because the Spirit of God anointed him.
5. To inspire members to know whom they belong to and the anointing that is on their life despite the circumstances.
6. Illustrate to members that Jesus will always defend them

Conclusion

The Bible says: And all bare him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

The people listening to him were amazed at how he explained scripture, and he was gracefully speaking on the theme. They sensed the goodness and Grace of God in the announcement that the ministry of the Messiah was now present. They have been waiting for the Messiah for quite some time. Now they heard that his ministry is present. The people around him were excited to know. They were delighted to be experiencing the ministry of the Messiah in their present context. Then a few people in the crowd said, oh, wait a minute. Is not this Joseph's Son? They were amazed initially when he spoke; then, they began to resent him for someone so familiar could talk with such Grace. Can I tell everyone in this congregation that your familiarity doesn't affect God's calling on your life? People can be familiar with you, but your calling is sacred. Your calling is set apart. People should be talking about this church that we are familiar with, but our calling is holy. Our calling is sacred because we ministered to the oppressed.

Our calling is sacred because we walked among those that society thought were lacking. Our calling is sacred because we impact the community where we are planted. I am familiar, but I have a Daddy who hooked me up with the Holy Spirit. Because I am hooked up with the Holy Spirit, I will do things you never imagine. Do I have any company in the building? You know whose you are. You belong to someone that loves you and will always defend you in your time of need.

I kept y'all too long. I didn't plan on preaching all this for today. I will stay in this chapter for a while because I believe we have just touched the surface of this text. Ahhh, let me

Topic: Ministry of the Darkness!

Text: Luke 23: 44-46

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”
When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Claim: When we find ourselves in dark situations, we can commit our spirit to the hand of God trusting that he will be there during our dark periods.

Focus: Death did not destroy the relationship between Jesus and God. He had unwavering confidence in the relationship despite facing his darkest moment.

Function: To inspire members that God is ever-present with them in all areas and circumstances of life.

Form:

1. Describe darkness and talk about some dark situations
 - a. What is our attitude towards darkness?
 - b. Show how God has been with people in their darkness
 - c. Why was darkness on the face of the earth?
2. The Beauty of the darkness
 - a. It was in the darkness the curtain was torn in two
 - b. It was while it was dark Jesus cried out: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.
 - c. It was in the darkness God showed us that Jesus conquer death and the grave.

Conclusion

Have a good day y'all. Have a wonderful Sabbath. But can I just tell you? Jesus says:

Father, I commend my Spirit in your hands. Jesus quoted Psalm 31:5; He quoted a prayer.

Y'all are still not with me. I remember growing up. We usually pray each night before going to bed.

Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Suppose I die before I wake. I pray the Lord, my soul, to take. I didn't grow up Adventist y'all. This was a common prayer. When Jesus shouted out Father into your hands, I commend my Spirit. All the surrounding people knew that He was quoting from the Hebrew Bible, and they are accustomed to hearing that prayer at nighttime.

Help me, Jesus. Because at nighttime, you pray, then you go to sleep. You don't tell your parents, friends, family, haters. Goodbye. Nah, you say Good Night. Jesus was telling everyone standing around the cross. Good night, everyone. See you soon. He is saying to them: It is not over yet.

I am going to sleep. But I will be back. A good night not Goodbye. Good night Church. This is not a Goodbye. It is only a Good Night. I am done church.

I am done. I wasn't gonna go their Pastor Gentry. But I am going now because we have no service on Sunday.

But can I remind you? That Sunday Morning is coming. The third day is coming They stretch him wide. They hang him high. He bowed his head. Then He died.

But that's not how the story ends. Because three days later. He rose again.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Do I have any company in the building?

Who wants to praise God right now with me? Thank him for your bright days.

Thank Him for your in-between days. But give him a big thanks right now for your dark days.

Because if it weren't for some of those dark days, you wouldn't know how to pray.

If it weren't for some of those dark days. You wouldn't trust God now.

Yes. Yes. Yes. I wish I wish I wish

You will open your mouth and give God praise right now.

Ministry of the Darkness!

Topic: THE REJECTED ONE

Scripture: Luke 6:20

20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

Claim: The text is saying that the poor can find happiness because the kingdom of God is with them.

Focus: Jesus promises to enhance the poor outcome in life currently and in the life to come.

Function: The sermon is giving hope to those who are poor in society.

Form:

1. The poor in society are often overlooked by the privileged in society
2. Poverty is often seen as a death sentence
3. Jesus sees the poor through the lens of God's kingdom
4. The poor in God's eyes should be happy
5. Jesus understands the poor because He is from a humble background.
6. Jesus mingling with people from different aspects of life
7. Jesus promises happiness for the poor

Conclusion

Our idea of "poor Jesus" is similarly skewed. Although Jesus left heaven, heaven never left Jesus because Kingdom "prosperity always begins from the inside out. You can put Jesus in a manger, but you can't put a manager in Jesus. Wealth, glory, and power seeped out of His pores like sweat on a hardworking man on a hot, humid day."

Can I just tell you this final thing then I am done? Jesus sees the poor through the lens of God's Kingdom. The poor, in God's eyes, should be happy. The poor should be blessed.

There is coming a day when there is more heartache and pain

No more pain, No more crying

The poor can rejoice because throughout the Bible

Jesus is sided with the marginalized

He transformed what people thought about the poor

He says the kingdom of God will be for the poor

Life can be hard down here. But Hallelujah when we get to the other side

What a day that will be. Praise the Lord

Title: I'm not giving up!

Text: St Luke 18:1-8

- 18 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.
- 2 He said: "In a certain town, there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought.
- 3 And there was a widow in that town kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'
- 4 "For some time, he refused. But finally, he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think,
- 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"
- 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.
- 7 And will not God bring justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?
Will he keep putting them off?
- 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Claim: Those who are weak can find the power to be faithful while awaiting the coming of God's Kingdom in its fullness.

Focus: When we are weak, we can find power in persevering prayer to help us live faithful until Christ return.

Function: To encourage perseverance in prayer while waiting patient

Form:

1. Highlight the normally expected behaviors of the judge and the widow by exploring the bible description of their status and role
2. Explain how they both function in unexpected ways when the judge persistently refuses to grant justice to the widow, but the widow persistently pursues justice from the judge.

3. Emphasize that the widow who is the image of weakness and powerlessness found power in perseverance which cause the judge to consider her plea for justice
4. The power of the weak is perseverance whether in prayer or the pursuit of justice
5. Persevering prayer gives power to the weak to be faithful while awaiting the coming of God's Kingdom in its fullness.
6. Even when our prayers seem unanswered, we should persevere in prayer because we know God will grant our requests in God's own timing.

Conclusion

One person said, "Until you have stood for years knocking at a locked door, your knuckles bleeding, you do not know what prayer is."

Are you standing at a locked door? Keep on knocking!

Perhaps if you pray hard enough, your prayer will propel you out of your chair and into the public arena, where you will pursue justice for the underprivileged.

Propel you out of your chair to speak for the rights of the marginalized

Propel you out of your chair to speak for the outcast

Propel you out of your chair to speak for the

Prayer transformed a lonely widow, one of the most powerless members of society, into a potent agent for achieving justice, one of the primary hallmarks of our Father's kingdom.

What can it do for you? I hear the songwriter says:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear;

What a privilege to carry, Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere.

We should never be discouraged; Take it to the Lord in prayer!

Can we find a friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness; Take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge, Take it to the Lord in prayer!

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer!

He'll take and shield you in His arms; thou wilt find solace there.

Topic: WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Text: St Luke 10:25-37

25 Just then, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

27 He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

28 And he said, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 Now, by chance, a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, while traveling, came near him, and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37

He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Half-Dead Man

30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

Claim: We should Love people from all different backgrounds of life equally without favoritism. Challenging Christians to care for the marginalized.

Focus: Since Christians love God, they are called to love the marginalized around them as much as themselves.

Function: This sermon will challenge Christians to care for the marginalized in our community and around the world.

Form:

1. The fundamental call on a Christian’s life is to love God
2. Loving God is not just a spiritual relationship

3. Loving God is also about social relationship
4. The greatest expression of love to God is to love your neighbor
5. When we show love to the marginalized, we demonstrate our love for God

Conclusion

To Jews, Samaritans were social outcasts and religious heretics, even though they observed the laws of Moses. So, when the Samaritan encountered the naked half-dead man, he had the SAME moral dilemma as the Priest and the Levite.

But UNLIKE the Priest, who came, saw and passed by on the other side.

UNLIKE, the Levite who came, saw and passed by on the other side

The Samaritan, CAME, SAW, and FELT COMPASSION. And compassion moved the Samaritan to bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them, put him on his beast, brought him to an inn, took care of him, paid the innkeeper to care for him, and promise to pay all extra expense!

The Samaritan embodied the great commandment of love.

The Samaritans are those who

- organize
- advocate
- protest

There was a good Samaritan named Harriet Tubman, who escaped slavery and risked her life to free other enslaved people using the Underground Railroad.

There was a good Samaritan named Martin Luther King Jr. He led the Civil Rights Movement, which resulted in the legislation of the Civil Rights Act that supports racial equality in America by outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin.

But I also want to remind you of Good Samaritan who came off earth's scene 2000 years.

He declares

The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. To proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, set the oppressed free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The Samaritan embodied the great commandment of love.

So, what's love got to do with it? Love has everything to do with because compassion and mercy are the outworking of love!

